

RITES AND RITUALS *of* KASHMIRI BRAHMINS

S. S. TOSHKHANI

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Rituals can be described as established patterns of religious activity embedded in the cultural consciousness of a people, seeking to link the mundane or natural reality with the divine or trans-natural. Although scholars all over the world have evinced a marked interest in the study of Hindu, and in particular Vedic, ritual in the recent years, viewing it from different perspectives, there has been hardly any focus on the ritual behaviour of Kashmiri Brahmins, or Kashmiri Pandits as they are more commonly known, as a separate area of scholastic inquiry. This is perhaps because the fundamental core of their rites and rituals is much the same as that of the ritual system prevailing among Hindus in other parts of the country. At the same time, with regional factors or deshachara coming into play, a whole body of new accoutrements has grown around this core over the centuries which can be characterized as distinctly Kashmiri. From this point of view, there is much in the ceremonies and sacraments which characterize the religious life of Kashmiri Brahmins that could form a fascinating field of study for the religious historian as well as the social anthropologist.

Prompted by such an intent this book sets to examine the ritual activity of the numerically small but culturally rich community of Kashmiri Pandits, seeking to explore its distinguishing features and also to comprehend the "formative consciousness" and epistemological foundations on which their ritual system is based. This system, as this study points out, remains anchored in the ordainments of the Grihyasutras of Laugakshi associated with the Kathaka school of Black Yajurveda which is replete with Vedic elements and forms the substratum of the sacramental beliefs and domestic rituals of the Kashmiri Brahmins. The Vedic substratum, however, is overlaid with indigenous elements, the process having begun during the era of the Nilamata Purana, a 6th century text which presents a picture of the religious beliefs and cultural practices prevalent in early Kashmir and points to a shift to Puranic modes of worship.

Later, from the 7th century, the esoteric cults of Tantrism came to occupy the centre-stage in the religion practiced in Kashmir with an exclusive body of liturgical texts primarily propagating the doctrine of the union of Shiva and Shakti. In the 10th century, the great Abhinavagupta synthesized and integrated the Tantric Krama, Kula and Trika schools into the monistic vision of what is known as Kashmir

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Preface

This study is an attempt to examine the characteristic features and peculiarities of the rites and rituals of Kashmiri Hindus as an essential part of their religious life and socio-cultural traditions. It also seeks to analyze the conceptual and epistemological framework in which the sacramental acts and ceremonies that constitute these rituals can be understood, besides exploring their structural and cognitive elements. Submitted originally by me as a research project under the title 'Rituals and Ritual arts of Kashmir', it was sponsored by the Himalayan Research and Cultural Foundation and undertaken with financial assistance by the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts.

The task, I must admit, was by no means an easy one in view of the fact that no systematic work has been done on the subject so far by religious scholars, ritual experts or social anthropologists. Although scholars all over the world have shown a marked interest in ritual studies in the recent years, in particular Vedic ritual, presenting significant insights in the field, the ritual systems followed by Kashmiri Hindus have not been studied as a separate area of inquiry. This is perhaps because of the fact that the religious rites and ceremonies prevalent among them agree in most respects with the basic features of the religious rituals performed by Hindus elsewhere in India. Yet, there are some remarkable variations, modifications, as well as innovations prompted by *deśācāra* or regional customs and practices which make their study interesting and rewarding. In several cases the ritual behavior of Kashmiri Hindus can be traced to elements mainly of an indigenous origin despite the pan-Hindu nature it may seem to display outwardly. It is the extent to which this behavior adheres to, or deviates from the general pattern to distinguish itself that provided the scope and range for my investigation. Apart from the lack of any research-oriented study on the ritual traditions of Kashmiri Brahmins, there were several other factors

that I had to contend with while surveying the field for starting my work. For instance, there were problems caused by their mass exodus from Kashmir in the wake of terrorist violence. This made the chances to witness an actual ritual performance in its original form taking place among them in the present state of their dispersal very rare, excepting the sacred thread investiture, marriage ceremony and funeral rites. Accessibility to a good part of literature related to the subject was also hindered due to the present disturbed conditions in Kashmir. The situation was further complicated by the difficulties arising from the extreme shortage of practicing priests whose numbers have kept on dwindling for several decades now because circumstances have forced them to adopt professions other than priesthood. Their position in society became particularly untenable as they continued to be looked down upon for dependence for their sustenance on their patrons who too were Brahmins. Starting with Sanskrit teachers in government-run Pathshalas and other schools, they took to different avenues of fruitful employment and soon became on par with others as professionals in every field, causing at the same time a severe dearth of functional experts needed for conducting ritual performances. Even those among the priestly class who still adhered to their traditional calling were not in a position to provide authentic information of the kind that could be actually useful as very few of them were adequately knowledgeable to be able to meet my requirements. Confronted by such a situation, I decided to forge my own conceptual and methodological tools and adopt an approach based on both study of related ritual texts and fieldwork—the latter including interviews and discussions with available experts and resource persons. Needless to say that this approach bore positive fruit, helping me to piece together information about the actual state of ritual activities of Kashmiri Hindus as it prevails today and as it has been in days of yore.

I owe my gratitude to Prof. K. Warikoo, Secretary General of the Himalayan Research and Cultural Foundation, for his help and consistent persuation to have this study published in book form. I am equally grateful to Prof. Bansilal Fotedar for the much useful assistance and also valuable advice he rendered to me in my research work and compilation of this book. I also wish to thank my wife Sarita Toshkhani who with her constant support and gentle insistence goaded me to complete my task.

I am fully confident that this book will be of interest to scholars and others eager to know about this lesser known but important aspect of Kashmiri Pandit religious and socio-cultural life.

Shashi Shekhar Toshkhani

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Rituals can be described as established patterns of religious activity embedded in the cultural consciousness of a people, seeking to link the mundane or natural reality with the divine or transnatural. They combine in their structure mental, physical and verbal actions which achieve a symbolic character giving the whole a meaning and significance through "invocation of the sacred and the transcendent" beyond what any natural process can give it. As Prof. Daya Krishna has pointed out, rituals transform the biological cycle, which is "the most fundamental of all cycles", into a cultural cycle. That is why, "in all cultures birth and death are not just biological phenomena but profound cultural events associated with a lot of ritual and ceremonies which transform the biological into the cultural," he explains.[1] The ritual processes that set into motion this transformation of the natural or the causal into the cultural are closely related to the attitude of a civilization to time and space and their sacralization and symbolization. In the Indian cultural context they begin with the birth of an individual, or even earlier with conception, continuing through crucial stages of his life up to his death and are collectively called *saṁskāras*. Apart from rituals focused on passage of time, or rites of passage as they are alternatively called, there are ceremonies related to different forms of worship in which the blessing of gods/goddesses is invoked for fulfillment of worldly desires or for spiritual enlightenment. These worship rituals, known as *pūjās* in Hindu religious terms, may vary from place to place and in different social milieus but also have many similarities in their internal structure.

Whether seen as encoded processes of change or expressions of reverence for the sacred, the fundamental ritual activity prevalent among Kashmiri Hindus, like Hindus living in other parts of India, can be broadly classified under these heads: *saṁskāras* or life-cycle rituals and other domestic ceremonies, *pūjā* or worship service, Shaiva and Shakta Tantric practices, and ritual arts. The last rather than being an independent activity can be taken to be a part of different ceremonials. Jayant Burde divides religious rituals into four categories: worship rituals, rites of passage, festive rituals and sacraments.[2] I have taken the *saṁskāras* or life-cycle rituals first as these for the common Kashmiri Hindus form the core of religion with *Pūjā* coming next. While the origin of many of these can be traced to hoary antiquity, their core structure derives mainly form Vedic, Puranic and Āgamic sources, with a mass of popular local beliefs and social customs having gathered around this core. The accouterments by themselves are of great significance and interest as it is these that have given Kashmiri Hindu rituals their particularity together with the myths which are acted out through them. These rituals are, therefore, universal in the Indian context as well as unique in their own way. *Saṁskāras* or life-cycle rituals, as pointed out earlier, are performed at different stages in an individual's rituals life from birth to death while *Pūjā* rites are related to daily or periodical rituals based on the beliefs of the religious cult to which a person or his family belongs. This is how Nusashi Tachikawa and Shaon Hino, noted Japanese scholars of Indian rituals, classify them. They divide religious activity into two kinds: "(1) that which takes as its goal the spiritual well-being of the individual; and (2) that which has the purpose of enabling the group or the society to operate smoothly (festivals, initiation rites etc.)".[3] But whether performed with the purpose of spiritual or material well-being of an individual or religious cultivation of a social group, rituals serve as means of communicating with divine beings or transnatural powers that are believed to guide and influence the course of human actions. While benevolent and favourable influences are sought to be attracted and appeased, ritual devices are used to ward off or banish harmful and hostile influences (evil and uncanny spirits, goblins, demons etc.), often by invoking the help of deities and gods. In fact, ritual practices all over the world follow a similar pattern viz. purification, banishment, propitiation and consecration.

As we scan Kashmiri Hindu ritual practices, we find their constituent elements more or less the same as those discernible in Hindu *saṁskāras* in general, there being

a common thread running between them. Fire forms the first and most sacred of these components, being worshiped as the "chief domestic deity" since the Vedic and perhaps pre-Vedic times – *agniṁ īde purohitam*. Agni is the presiding deity of sacrifices and various domestic rites and ceremonies. It purifies, consecrates and acts as a protector and witness to human intent. Offerings are made into fire and through it to the gods, at almost every religious rite. Kashmiris burn bdellium and sesame or mustard seeds in a *kāngrī* (fire-pot) during marriages and other ceremonies to scare away evil spirits. Water is the next important constituent used for its purifying effects and powers to ward off evil influences and contamination. It is used as a potent purifying medium across cultures. Bath, sipping water (*ācamana*) and lustration or sprinkling of water are believed to be means of removing physical as well as moral or spiritual impurities and are common features of Kashmiri Hindu ceremonials. Bathing in sacred rivers is believed to wash away all sins and physical and spiritual impurity. "The Hindu led a life regularly purified by water from his conception in the womb up to his death and even after it", writes Dr. Rajbali Pandey in his book Hindu Saṁskāras.[4] This is true in respect of the Kashmiri Hindu too who considers bathing essential before marriage and at the sacred thread investiture, tonsure and other religious rites. Sprinkling of water over the head or on the ground is also considered essential for success, fame, happiness, peace etc. by him.

Prayers, appeals and blessings are another class of constituents that can be listed in this context. Prayer "seeks the intervention of the transcendent in the normal processes that are supposed to be governed by causality," says Prof. Daya Krishna in his book 'Prolegomena to Any Future Historiography of Cultures and Civilizations'. Prayers for success, health, wealth, long life, comfort, happiness, obtaining children, material prosperity, spiritual salvation etc. are a common feature of Kashmiri Hindu rituals, and also seeking of blessings of gods, elders, teachers, spiritual personalities. Blessings are invoked for living a long and successful life at birthday ceremonies, for fulfillment of desires and wishes and for spiritual and material progress. Blessings are also bestowed upon children and juniors and others by parents, teachers, elders, saints and godly persons.

Offering sacrifices in the form of food and presents to propitiate and please gods and supernatural beings is another major constituent of Kashmiri Hindu rituals. Special occasions and festivals have been set apart to invite, placate and feast them

in the hope of gaining their favours. Besides the fire sacrifices at which barley, rice, sesame seeds, different kinds of dried fruits and molasses or sugar candy, clarified butter or ghee, milk etc., are offered as oblations, the most common offering made to gods is *tāhrī* or rice flavoured with turmeric powder and ghee or oil. Sacrificial food like *khicharī* and fish and rice is offered to appease Kubera, the Lord of the Yakshas, and the *Gṛhadevatā* or the Deity of the House, while meat dishes, chopped liver and lungs of a lamb are offered as sacrifice to deities like Bhairava, Kali, Jwala and Tripura. Special days are dedicated to their worship. To the Goddess Khir Bhawani only milk or *khīr* is offered while sweet bread-cakes called *roṭh* are offered to Ganesha and Lakshmi. Lambs are also slaughtered to please some deities with animal sacrifice, but such sacrifice has now become extremely rare.

Kashmiri Hindus, like their co-religionists elsewhere in the country, attach great importance to orientation or the direction that the performer of a ritual act should face while observing a rite. Direction of movement in domestic or other rituals is, therefore, clearly specified in the religious texts they follow. According to Dr. Rajbali Pandey, it is "based on the picturesque symbolism of the path of the sun and myths according to which different directions were ruled by different deities."[5] Veena Das has analyzed "the symbolism of laterality" in detail while examining the Hindu theories of caste and rituals through a study of Hindu texts in her book 'Structure and Cognition: Aspects of Hindu Caste and Ritual'.[6] It is a very interesting study in which she has discussed the use of right and left in performance of domestic rituals as prescribed in the Gobhila Gṛhyasūtra, observing that "the right side has precedence over the left in rituals to mark the passage of time, as in the morning and evening oblations to be offered to the fire on the advent of the new-moon and full-moon".[7] She further writes: "Similarly, in all rites of transition except death the use of the right side is prescribed". The opposition between right and left, she concludes, "is clearly associated with 'rites to gods' and 'rites to ancestors', the former being associated with propitiation of divine beings who are friendly and benevolent, the latter being associated with those supernatural beings who have to be appeased, who inspire terror and have the potential of causing great harm if they are not regularly propitiated."[8] This applies fully to the domestic rites of Kashmiri Hindus as well, though they follow different texts about which we shall discuss later. Following Indian mythology, Kashmiri Hindus too consider south to be the direction of Yama, the god

of Death, and hence inauspicious. In all auspicious rites performed by them the subject faces the east, which is associated with light and warmth and, therefore, "happiness and glory." Likewise, in making circumambulations, they follow the path of the sun. There are in fact specific rules which they follow in different ritualistic contexts in regards to the four cardinal points – east – west – south – north and other directions. There are ten recognized directions in all having ten different presiding deities – a fact which has essentially to be kept in mind regarding the placement of ritual objects and position of the subject of the ritual acts during the course of a ceremonial. (These directions are: *pūrva, āgneya, dakṣina, nairṛtya, paścima, uttara, īśāna, triśūla, ūrdhva* and *adhaḥ*).

The role that symbolism plays in the rites and rituals of Kashmiri Hindus is also quite significant with "analogous objects and imitative behaviour" used as symbols to stimulate the mind. Stepping on a stone by the Brahmachari in Upanayana and the bride and bridegroom during the marriage ceremony, looking at the polar star, sesame and rice, anointment, eating together, touching the heart and looking towards the sun are mentioned by Rajbali Pandey as symbolic aspects of Hindu *saṁskāras*. To these can be added placing a pestle on a ring of grass during Yaksha Amāvasî Pūjā, worshipping earthen ritual objects during Shivarātri, burning birch bark leaves in '*dŏd dyun*" ceremony of a pregnant daughter-in-law, worshipping the *kalaśa, daybata* or sharing of a meal in the same plate by the bride and bridegroom at the wedding ceremony (*sahāśanaṁ*), touching the shoulder of the patron or priest making food-offerings by his family-members during birthday or other ceremonies, offering a lump of candy sugar to the bridegroom and the bride to nibble at in turns as acts and objects having symbolic significance in Kashmiri Hindu rituals.

Kashmiri Hindus also observe many taboos associated with various occasions of life like pregnancy of a woman, childbirth, adolescence, marriage and death. Some of them are just precautionary steps taken to prevent dangers, while others are observed with the intention of warding off evil influences or the evil eye. Then there are taboos associated with certain days or months which are believed to be unlucky or inauspicious and when certain things are not to be done. Omens and inauspicious configurations of the stars fall in this category. There are also minor taboos connected with food, which are followed mostly for the purpose of protecting a person from evil influence or impurity – physical, moral or spiritual. Fasting, abstaining from

eating meat on particular days or occasions, notions of purity and impurity in cooking, prohibition or prescription of particular kinds of food – these are also included in the kind of taboos that the orthodox among Kashmiri Hindus keenly observe. There is thus a whole system of taboos linked with the ritual practices of the community.

Divinatory methods based on the belief that gods indicate what is to come in the future through the medium of natural phenomena have an important place in the pattern of ritualistic behaviour of the Kashmiri Hindus, especially astrology with which they seem to be obsessively preoccupied. Besides liturgical utterances (mantras) and acts, gods are also sought to be pleased and entertained in a Kashmiri Hindu ritual by song and dance in order to evoke generosity and benevolence from them in the form of material prosperity, success and protection from misfortune. Many of these basic characteristics and patterns of Kashmiri rituals are common to all Hindu rituals or rituals as practiced by different communities the world in general. All these have been discussed in their appropriate contexts in the study.

From these general observations about the main constituents of rituals, it would be proper to proceed to have a look at the original sources of inquiry – the primary texts which are specifically devoted to Kashmiri Hindu rituals and their practice. The most important text that offered me the greatest vantage point to start my investigation was the *Gṛhyasūtra* composed by Laugakshi Muni for the benefit of the adherents of the Kāṭhaka school of the Black Yajurveda to which the Kashmiri Hindus belong – a fact of which most of them are ignorant today. The rules and regulations laid down by him alone are regarded by them as the true norm and the source of their *ācāra*, no other *gṛhyasūtra* being used in Kashmir for guidance in ritual praxis. The Black Yajurveda is called so because it is a blend of '*yajus*' or verses after which it is named and passages of expository prose which resemble a *Brahmaṇa*. Kāṭhaka Saṁhitā to which the Kāṭhaka Sūtras of Laugakshi are related, is one of the three Saṁhitās which the Black Yajurveda has, the other two being Taittirīya Samhitā and the Maitrāyanī Śaṁhitā. To the Maitrāyanī Saṁhitā belong the Mānava and the Vārāha Śrauta and Gṛhyasūtras, which accounts for the many similarities that the Laugākshi Sūtra has with them.

The Laugākshi Gṛhyasūtra is also known by other names like Kāṭhaka Sūtra or Cāraṇīya Gṛhyasūtra because the theological school to which the Sūtras relate also bears the names of Kāṭhaka, Carka or Cāraṇīya. In terms of historical development

the ritual system followed by Kashmiri Hindus seems to be of hoary antiquity as it is replete with Vedic elements. Yet it is difficult to determine the exact date when Laugākshi composed his work. According to Veena Das, the *gṛhyasūtras* are thought to have been compiled between c. 500-200 B.C.,[9] so the Laugākshī Gṛhyasūtras too seem to belong to that period. Though the Laugākshī Gṛhyasūtra, or Kāṭhaka Sūtra, as it is alternately called, is the only *gṛhyasūtra* of the Kāṭhaka School, and though it has been listed among the important *gṛhyasūtras*, we find very little note being taken of it in the array of references and cross-references available on the Sūtra literature, which suggests that the text must not have been operational in many areas outside Kashmir. Nor has anyone among the growing number of Western or Indian ritual scholars, except W. Caland, thought of translating or commentating on it. As for the original text, it was only after much search and great effort that I could procure a copy each of the two volumes edited by Pandit Madhusūdan Kaul Shastri for the Research Department of the Kashmir Government and published under the Kashmir Sanskrit Text Series (KSTS). Though Madhusudan Kaul Shastri has pointed out that "a vast literature" has sprung around the (Laugākshī Gṛhyasūtra in the form of a *vivarṇa* by Aditya Darshana, *paddhati* by Brahmanabala and *bhāśyam* by Devapala,[10] I could not lay my hand on it excepting the last mentioned which is incorporated in the edition brought our by Madhusudan Kaul Shastri. The other two and the manuals connected with the main text could not be found., However, Pandit Keshav Bhatt Jyotshi, who was a leading ritual expert of Kashmir, brought out a whole series of guide-books based on the fundamental text at his own expense and distributed these either free of cost or at very low prices. Yet the entire text of the *Sūtras* was never available to a common Kashmiri even in the best of times. The Laugākshī Gṛhyasūtra lays down directions for various ritual practices, ceremonies, rites and sacrifices the performance of which was considered to be widely current among Kashmiri Brahmins, and even now they guide every stage of their life and even beyond. Many changes have occurred in their rituals practices with the passage of time, their religious life having undergone considerable transformation with the introduction of quite a number of new factors, yet Laugākshī Sūtras remain the one constant around which their beliefs and sacraments continue to revolve. Edited by Madhusdan Kaul Shastri, the Sūtras run into two volumes together with the commentary by Devapala. Madhusudan Kaul Shastri has written an introduction to the 1st volume, which consists

of 40 *kāṇḍikās* or chapters, giving preliminary information about the text and the commentator. The second volume which has 33 *kāṇḍikās* has no such introduction by the editor despite his promise to explain things in detail in the context of usages current in Kashmir. While the first volume begins with rules and regulations prescribed for the *brahmacārī* and ends with *cūḍākaraṇa* or tonsure, the second volume too, quite interestingly starts with *upanayana* or the sacred thread investiture ceremony and ends with *holaka*, a ceremony performed by girls desirous of obtaining good husbands. No translation of the Laugākshī Gṛhyasūtra is available in any Indian or Western language, though Dr. Caland critically edited the text with extracts from three commentaries and addition of appendixes and indexes. With no exegetical work other than the one mentioned by Madhusudan Kaul Shastri available, the only way left open for me to properly analyse and understand its text and context was to study it in the light of other *gṛhyasūtras* like those of Āshvalāyana, Āpastamba, Gobhila, Pāraskara, Hiraṇyakeshī etc. I also found it useful to consult the sacrificial ritual of the Śatapatha Brahmaṇa and several other texts giving details of ritual performances for a comparative study. It was indeed interesting to find the Laugākshi Gṛhyasūtra agreeing in essence with many things prescribed in other *gṛhyasūtras*, most of the rules and regulations in respect of important *saṁskāras* or initiation rituals being almost common, with only some modifications and variations here and there that allow for regional customs, beliefs and usages. The affinity between Laugakshi's and other Sūtras dealing with domestic rituals is accounted mainly by the fact that they are all replete with elements and features from the Vedic rituals.

There are similarities between the Laugākshī Gṛhyasūtras and the Mānava and Vārāha Gṛhyasūtras perhaps because they all belong to the Black Yajurveda. Pandit Madhusudan Kaul Shastri has given several parallel passages from these two Gṛhyasūtras to illustrate their mutual kinship.[11] So great are these similarities in some cases, points out Shastri, that they are not confined only to the sense, but are found also in the verbal form to express the sense. Like the Laugākshī Gṛhyasūtras, the Vārāha Gṛhyasūtras too prescribe *gāyana* and *vādana* (vocal and instrumental music) as an essential part of the marriage ceremonies along with dance. Like other manuals of domestic rituals for the Hindus, hymns belonging to the Yajurveda having a general applicability are to be recited during the performance of the sacraments and sacrifices prescribed by Laugākshi.

As in other *gṛhyasūtras*, the sacrifices prescribed in the Laugākshī Gṛhyasūtra can be divided into two groups: (1) *Śrauta* or the public sacrifices mentioned in the *śrutis*, and (2) *gṛhya* or domestic sacrifices also called *smārta* as they belong to the *smṛti* tradition. Prominent among the *śrauta* sacrifices described in the Laugākshi Gṛhyasūtras are the *Dārśapūrnamāsa Iṣṭi* (an ancient ritual performed on the new-moon day and the full-moon day) the five *pāka-yajñas* or food sacrifices and the *aṣṭakas*, beside a few other Vedic rituals. The sacrifices are categorized as *nitya* or obligatory, *kāmya* or optional, which are performed to achieve certain desired ends and *prāyāścitta* or expiatory. In the last category, there are several *kṛcharas* (expiatory rituals) mentioned in the Laugākshi Gṛhyasūtras.

There are also some important differences that can be noted between the Laugākshi Gṛhyasūtras and other *gṛhyasūtras*. The very first difference is regarding the order in which the *saṁskāras* or life-cycle rituals are placed. Most of the *gṛhyasūtras* start the list of the sixteen standard *saṁskāras* with *vivāha* or marriage, which is followed by the description of *garbhādāna. puṁsvana, sīmāntonnayana, jātakarma, muṇḍana, annaprāśana, cuḍākaraṇa, upanayana, keśānta and samāvartana saṁskāras*. Then they describe the sacrifices and rituals to be performed by a married couple after establishing the domestic fire, dealing with the *antyeṣṭi* or funeral rites only at the end, with some of them relegating these rites to an appendix. In Laugākshi Gṛhyasūtras, the order is somewhat different. It begins with the rules and regulations to be followed by a *brahmacārī* and the vows during his student days till he is prepared to take up the responsibilities of a householder's life. The *vivāha* or the marriage ceremony proper comes up for description only in the 25th chapter of the 1st volume, followed by *jātakarma*, *nāmakaraṇa* and *cūḍākaraṇa*. The childhood rituals include the *bālakasūtika-rakśaṇārtha homa* or the fire sacrifice for protecting the new born baby and the mother from impurity of birth and evil influences. To these a few more minor childhood *saṁskāras* have been added like *āditya- darśana* and *candra-darśana* (showing the sun and the moon to a child for the first time), which are interesting from the point of view of child psychology. There is also a hint of something resembling the present day *divagon* ceremony of Kashmiri Pandits in a ceremony that was performed on the marriage day eve. Yet another ceremony resembles the *ganḍun* or *vāgdān*, as betrothal is called in Kashmiri.

The *upanayana* or the sacred thread investiture ceremony is described in the second volume strictly according to the Vedic rites. Known commonly as *mekhal* in the local parlance, it has become a package of several educational *saṁskāras* today including *vidyārambha, daṇḍagrahaṇa, bhikśa, gāyatrī upadeśa, samāvartana* etc. This is followed by the description of various sacrifices a married couple is enjoined to perform after establishing the domestic fire. These include the four fire sacrifices, the four *pāka-yajñas* or cooked food sacrifices, the *paśukalpa* or animal sacrifices and also the ritualistic ceremonies a newly married couple is required to perform on constructing and entering a new house. Then there are the *aṣṭakas* or various *śrāddhas* and also the *nandimukha śrāddha* and so on. There is also detailed description of the *putreṣṭi* sacrifice meant for those who are desirous of having a male child. The second volume closes with the description of *rākā-homa* or *holaka* – a ceremony meant for unmarried girls to perform so as to obtain good husbands. Many ritualistic details given in the other *gṛhyasūtras* do not find place in the Laugākshi Gṛhyasūtra, while several ceremonials detailed in it are not found in other *gṛhyasūtras*. All these features of Laugākshi's directions on rituals of the domestic cult have been discussed in the chapters that follow.

We are not sure whether all the domestic rites and ceremonies prescribed in the Laugākshi Gṛhyasūtra were actually performed by the Brahmaṇas of Kashmir at any point in time or not. The picture that emerges after a close look at the *gṛhyasūtras* is that of a people whole believed in the "miraculous efficacy" of rituals and sacrifices and looked upon the Vedas as their main source. At several places one catches glimpses of popular or folk religion as well. However, the complexion of the ritualistic performances of the Pandits has undergone complete transformation now as a result of the changed socio-cultural and economic situation with many a rituals having been done away with and many others modified to suit exigencies of circumstances brought about by the process of modernization. Other factors have also intervened to alter the scenario, including introduction of new elements in religious beliefs and practices. Further, the near total displacement of Kashmiri Pandits from their native soil has brought about a situation in which minimal performance of only the most essential rituals is possible. These include *mekhal* or the sacred thread ceremony, *nethûr* or nuptials and *antyeṣṭi* or funeral rites, as pointed out earlier. Pre-natal *saṁskāras* like '*dŏd dyun*' or the curds ceremony have completely vanished, while post-natal

ceremonies like *jātkarma* or *śrāna sŏndar* which constitutes the ritual bath given to a mother and child on or after the sixth day of delivery, has ceased to be performed as a religious ritual. Though *kāhnethûr* or the eleventh day purification rites corresponding to *nāmakarṇa* and *zarkāsay* or the first tonsure of the male child continue to be performed by some, the precise dates prescribed in the sacred texts are no longer adhered to. Ceremonies relating to laying of the foundation of and entry into a new house are, however, still being performed in the traditional manner. And as pointed above, though Laugākshi's Sūtras still remain the most essential ritual text that Kashmiri Hindus follow, introduction of Purānic and Āgamic Hinduism constitutes the second stage in the development of their ritualistic system – a state that continues till today with some modifications necessitated by the passage of time.

Thus, despite the continued adherence to the Gṛhyasūtras of Laugākshi, these do not constitute the only source of inquiry about the ritualistic traditions of the Kashmir Hindu society through all their stages of development. A complete, coherent and clear picture of the ritualistic core of their religious life can be obtained only after glimpsing through several other texts and sources materials which have a bearing on it. Two most important texts in this context are the Nilmata Purāna and Bhringīsha Samhitā – both of them representing the stage when Purānic and Āgamic cultic practices had gradually replaced the Vedic elements as the dominant features in the ritual system of the Kashmiris. The Nilamata Purāna, which gives Kashmir's own creation myth and provides glimpses of its early religion and ritual, lays more stress on fasts, festivals, pilgrimages and collective temple worship than on *yajñas* or fire sacrifices that from the core of Vedic ritual. It prescribes *vratas* or religious observances and *utsavas* or festivals which are related to sacred dates, occasions and places with *pūjā* (individual or group worship of a chosen deity or deities), *japa* (reciting the mantras or names of gods), *homa* (fire ritual), *dāna* (charity), *upavāsa* (fasting), *yātrā* (pilgrimage) etc. forming their constituent parts. Some of the festivals described in the Nilmata have only a thin religious veneer covering them, their rituals being associated more with agriculture, as is the case with *Kṛṣyārambha, Yāvagrāyana, Navānna Vidhāna* and *Śyāmādevī Pūjana*, or with seasonal changes as is the case with the *Irāmañjarī Pūjā, Nava Samvatsara Mahotsava, Nava Himapātotsava* and the *vratas* of *Uttarāyaṇa* and *Dakshiṇāyaṇa*. Some of them, which are more definitely of religious importance, have been described without giving

any details of the specific rituals involved. One thing that can be clearly noted is that the ritualistic aspects of these *vratas*. *utsavas*, *yātrās* and *pūjās* are in the nature of replacements of Vedic sacrifices, with Vedic gods yielding place to a whole new pantheon of Purānic gods and goddesses, most of them of local origin. There is a clear thrust towards popular or folk religion in them with avoiding of violence and promises of "attainment of same merits and rewards" as in various Vedic sacrifices, their significant features. Lack of ritualistic details, however, come in the way of understanding their precise characteristics, yet many of them have continued to the present day together with their social and cultural implications.

The Bhringīsha Samhitā, which incorporates various *Tīrtha Māhātamyas* (glorification of sacred sites), is an important text from the point of view of the information it gives about various places of pilgrimage and centres of worship in Kashmir, including holy springs, caves and rivers. While Bühler and Stein have found these *Māhātmyas* useful for the light they throw on the sacred topography of Kashmir, their importance for the study of ritual traditions does not seem to have been realized so far. Stein does consider the Bhringīsh Samhitā to be "a very rare and valuable" work, but he considers some of the *māhātmyas* included in it to be of a very recent origin. Dr. Yashpal Khajuria on the other hand is of the view that its compilation must have begun in the 5th century of the Vikram era, much before the Nilmata is supposed to have composed, with most of the work completed at least twelve hundred years back. According to Dr. Khajuria, the same Maharishi Bhringish whose name is associated with Kashyapa, Shandilya and other great ancient sages much have been its original author, but later on others belonging to his lineage must have made further additions to it's giving it present shape.[12] Whatever it be, one cannot but notice the dominance of the Shaivāgamic and Shākta cults in its glorification of the sacred places devoted to various deities worshipped in Kashmir. Beginning with Tulmul where the famous shrine sacred to Mahārājñyī locally pronounced as Mahārāgnyā or Kshir Bhavani is located, the Samhitā describes the *māhātmya* of the shrines of Jyeshṭhā, Shārikā, Jwālā, Shāradā and other manifestations of the Mother Goddess together with their legends, hymns, mantras and modes of worship, including that of the *Śrīyantra* or the sacred diagram representing Shakti, which amply indicates the popularity of the cult at the time it was written. This is further confirmed by the invocation to "Shrī Tripurasundrī" at the beginning of the section on '*Rājñyī*

Prādurbhāvaḥ'. The *māhātmyas* of Amarnāth, Harmukaṭa Gangā, Kapālamochana *tīrthas* indicate the Shaiva orientation of the work. The Bhringīsh Saṁhitā also celebrates other holy springs, rivers and places of pilgrimage in Kashmir, much in the manner of the Nilamata Purāna. It is obvious, therefore, that both the Nilamata and the Bhringīsh Saṁhitā belong to a period when religious life had shifted to places of pilgrimage and collective worship and religious ceremonies were performed more as a group activity. While propitiation of gods and goddesses for wordly or spiritual gains remained the objective of these ritualistic performances, their form marked a perceptibly new development.

It was probably from the 4th century onward that Tantric modes of worship and ritual practices started gaining popularity in Kashmir. Various schools of Tantric theology like Kaula, Krama and later Trika came into being, exerting a tremendous impact on the minds of the people. With the growing influence of Tantra on religious life, temples, shrines, cremation grounds and other sacred sites provided the setting for ritual acts and mantric utterances and came to be regarded as *manḍalas* institutionalized. The designation of the Shārikā Devî temple at Hariparvat, Srinagar as Cakreśwarî or the Supreme Deity of the Cakra is an example. To investigate the history and development as well as the theoretical underpinning of Tantric liturgy as practiced in Kashmir, an intensive study of a variety of texts becomes essential. Those still extant and relevant to the exegesis and praxis of Tantric rituals include the Mālinīvijaya Tantra, Svacchanda Tantra, Rudrayāmala Tantra, Kulārṇava Tantra, Mṛgendra Tantra, Netra Tantra, Lalitā Sahasranāma, Durgā Saptaśatī, YoginI Tantra, Siddhānta Tantra, Sāradā Tilaka, Maheśvara Kalpa, Vāmakeśvara Tantra, Devī Rahasya, Śiva Purāṇa etc. A good number of Tantra texts which were a source of numerous Tantric practices prevalent in medieval Kashmir are now lost. Many *Bhairava Śāstras* prescribing *bhairava yāgas,* and *parvas* are also not available. The Tantric practices prescribed in these texts were widely prevalent in Bengal, Assam and Gujrat besides Kashmir.

The rituals of the Krama, Kula and Trika schools of Āgamic Shaivism, and also of the dualist Shaiva Siddhānta which once flourished in Kashmir, were eventually integrated by non-dualist Kashmir Shaivism into itself along with their secret doctrines and practices. Some of these prescribed the rituals of the left path (*vāma mārga*) which involved the consumption and offering of meat, fish and wine to the deity, and also

of ritual intercourse. Kashmir Shaivites, especially Abhinavagupta, interiorized these rituals, "elevating them to a level beyond outer ceremony" and interpreting them in terms of their monistic philosophy. Covering the entire panorama of Tantric literature, Abhinavagupta presents a masterly exposition of the essential elements of Shaiva thought and ritual in his Tantrāloka. According to Navjivan Rastogi, it is the most comprehensive and important single source of authentic information about the various aspects of Shaiva ritual, with *mantra, mudrā, nyāsa, maṇḍala, dīkṣā, caryā, upāsanā* and *yāga* as its constituents and including *nityakarma* (daily rites) and *naimittika karma* (occasional rites).[13] It also deals with *antyeṣṭi* or the funerary rites and *śrāddha* or post-funerary rites as practiced by the Shivakarmīs or followers of Kashmir Shaiva rituals. However, initiation rites and several other rituals related to the original Trika tradition had died out centuries back.

In his 'Parātriśikā Vivaraṇa', Abhinavagupta connects the phenomena with logos, presenting "a whole philosophy of language"[14] and analyzing mantric utterance in its *parā, paśyantī, madhyamā* and *vaikharī* stages. Kashmir Shaivism maintains that all manifestation is identical with the transcendental Word or *parāvāk,* which is creative energy itself, and that every letter of the alphabet represents this energy in some form. The letters of the Sanskrit alphabet, according to Trika philosophy, are arranged in two ways called *Mātrikā* and *Mālinī. Mātṛkā,* which means the mother, can be defined as "phonematic creative energy" to use Jaideva Singh's words, while *Mālinī* literally means the goddess wearing the garland of the fifty letters of the Sanskrit alphabet. In *Mātṛkā* these letters are arranged in a regular order with the vowels coming first, and in *Mālinī* the vowels and consonants are mixed without regard to any serial order. Meditating upon *Mātṛkā* which has *akṣahrīm* as its mantra and upon *Mālinī* with its mantra as '*naphahrīm,* the Shaivites believe, brings about spiritual enlightenment leading to identification of the self with the supreme consciousness. Both these mantras have to be repeated twenty five times – five times each for the deities Īśāna, Tatpuruṣa, Aghora, Vāmadeva and Sadyojāta.

The Vaishnava Tantric cult of Pañcarātra which once fluorished in Kashmir, and according to some had its birth there, too has had a bearing on Kashmiri rituals. Pañcarātra texts like the Jayākhyā Saṁhitā may be mentioned in the context, which describe a large number of rituals and ceremonies, *mantras* and *mudrās* of the cult. References to Pañcarātra literature have been made by the celebrated Shaiva scholar

Utpalacharya in his Spandakārikā, particularly those pertaining to its Ekāyana school. It may be noted that Hariparvat, one of the holiest Hindu shrines in Kashmir, is also known as Pradyumna Pīṭha in ancient Kashmiri religious texts, suggesting that a seat of the Pañcarātra cult may have existed there. Pradyumna, it may be pointed out, is one of the four deities of the cult representing cosmic realities. His iconography as described in the Pañcarātra texts in the context of *mantra sādhanā* shows him as "brilliant yellow". According to Sanjukta Gupta, "He wears red silk clothes and also has four arms of which the primary two are like Vasudeva's. In his secondary left, he holds a bow, and his same right hand holds five arrows. (Pradyumna is equated with the god of Love who wields a bow made of flowers and bees and has five arrows made of five spring flowers). He has a *makara* ...... as his banner."[15] Worship of Pradyumna in the Pañcarātra tradition, however, appears to have been totally forgotten now.

Another esoteric cult which needs to be mentioned in the context of ritualistic practices of Kashmiri Hindus is that of *Shiva Karma*. Though the mystery of the origin of the cult still remains to be cleared, my discussion with Pandit Keshav Nath Handoo, perhaps one of the last living authorities on the *Shiva Karma* after Pandit Raghunath Kukiloo who passed away recently, yielded much useful information about the cultic practice of the Shivakarmīs. Today these practices seem to be confined mainly to marriage and funeral rites. According to Pandit Keshav Nath Handoo, Shiva alone is the supreme deity the Shivakarmīs worship along with all the deities associated with him. These deities, known as the *Shiva Brahamāṇḍa* include Ganesha, Durgā, Lakshmī Nārāyaṇa, the Iṣṭa Devî, Mahāmṛtyuyañjaya, the Guru, the *Navagrahas* and eight *Kshetrapālas* or guardians of the quarters. One has to undergo a certain *dīkṣā* or initiation rites to become a member of the esoteric sect, Pandit Keshav Nath Handoo said. These rituals involve worship of the goddess Annapurna.

"The goddess is taken out in a procession on a specially decorated *ratha* (chariot) and ritually cooked rice is distributed as *naivedya* among the initiates to mark the occasion", the octogenarian scholar revealed. The initiation ritual also includes a purification ceremony in which 108 oblations are offered to Annapurṇā and other gods to purify the mind along the thirty-five other *tattvas* or categories of manifestation. According to Pandit Keshav Nath, the ceremonies of *Dwāra Puzā* (worshiping of the bridegroom and the bride at the entrance gate of the bride's house)

and *Posha Pūzā* (showering of flowers on the bridegroom and the bride as embodiments of Shiva and Parvati during a Kashmiri Pandit wedding) are two *Shiva Karma* rituals, still commonly in vogue, but in public perception *Shiva Karma* is generally associated with the *antyeṣṭi kriyā* or funeral rites. The *kriyā* is known for intricacy of procedure and the length of time taken to perform it.

The *Shivakarmīs* regard the dead body (*śava*) as Shiva and give it a ritual bath, reciting hymns to Shiva instead of the usual *pāpanāśa* (liberation from sin) mantras. The objective of the *Shivakarma* rites is to achieve liberation of the deceased from the bonds of the world and his ultimate union with Shiva. The *Shivakarma* funeral rites also differ from the general practice in respect of preparing rice cakes or *piṇḍas* for offering to the departed soul and the mantric utterances accompanying the offering. At the end, the *Shivakarmī* makes a *jñāna khaḍga* (sword of knowledge) from 36 blades of the *darbha* grass representing the 36 *tattvas* and "strikes" at the head of the deceased to free him from all worldly links. There is surely more to *Shivakarma* rituals and their esoteric meanings, but that needs a detailed discussion. The *Paddhatis* of Shaiva post-funerary rituals, it may be pointed out, are included in the *karmakāṇḍa* compiled by Pandit Keshav Bhatt Jyotshi, but they are rarely followed now.

The Pūjā rituals of Kashmiri Hindus are generally elaborate and symbolic in structure and content. These include the daily (*nitya*) and occasional (*naimittika*) rites and the Pūjās offered on sacred dates and special occasions, festivals etc., both as individual and group religious activity. The basic ritualistic structure is more or less the same as that of the *ṣodaśa-upcāra- pūjā* or the worship service in sixteen steps commonly followed by Hindus in general. The Pūjā starts with the usual preliminary steps of sipping water for self-purification (*ācmana*), controlling breath (*praṇāyāma*), recitation of the *Gāyatrī mantra* (*vyāhṛti*) and contemplation of the deity (*dhyāna*). These steps are followed by worship of Ganapati and consecration of the ritual objects like the pot (*kalaśa*), the conch (*śankha*), the bell (*ghanṭā*) and the lamp (*dīpa*).

After the purification of self, the ritual site and the ritual objects, the main Pūjā begins with the invocation of the deity (ā*vāhana*) for being present at the ritual setting, and establishment of life-breath in the image (*jīvādāna* or *prāṇa-pratiṣṭhā*) . Reverence is then shown to the deity by offering the seat (*āsana*), the water for washing feet (*pādya*), the libation (*arghya*), the bath (*snāna*), the garment (*vastra*), fragrant materials (*gandha*), flowers (*puṣpa*), incense (*dhūpa*) and the lamp (*dīpa*).

Food is also offered to the deity (*naivedya*), which is partaken of by the participants as leftovers. In case the Pūjā is performed by a priest, *dakṣiṇā* or presents in cash or kind is offered to him as his fees. The Pūjā is concluded with salutation to the deity (*namaskāra*) and offering of flowers with recitation of mantras to let the deity return. These elements form the basic features of Kashmiri Hindu Pūjā rites in general and apply to individual as well as group religious activity undertaken for spiritual or material benefits at homes or at temples, shrines, places of pilgrimage etc. In case of Pūjās at temples and places of pilgrimage, the procedure concludes with *pradakṣiṇā* or clockwise circling of the sacred image.

Special procedures are followed for special Pūjās – and it is here that regional variations and peculiarities come into play. They have their own functions and symbolic meanings which constitute an attempt to enter into a relation with the sacred through the power of the ritual. Among the Pūjā or worship rites peculiar to Kashmiri Hindus, apart from daily practices, *sandhyā* and birthday rituals, are *Khetsi Māvas* or Yakṣāmāvasyā and *Gāḍabata* – both reminiscent of mixing and commingling of races in pre-historic Kashmir – when sacrificial food like *khicharī* and fish and rice is offered to propitiate and appease Kubera, the Lord of Yakshas and the *Gṛhadevatā* or the Deity of the House, as we have mentioned earlier. There is also *Pan*, originally a festival associated with the spinning of newly – produced cotton, which falls on Ganesha Chaturthī (*Vināyak tsorum*) and at which *roṭhs* (sweet-bread cakes) are offered to the twin goddesses Vibhā and Garbhā. Later Lakshmī Pūjā (worship of goddess Lakshmi) too was incorporated into the festival.

Among the most important festivals celebrated by Kashmiri Hindus is Shivarātri – a long drawn festival celebrated for a full fortnight as an elaborate Pūjā ritual associated with the appearance of Bhairava (Shiva) as *jwālā-linga* or a *linga* of flame. Instead of *caturdaśī* when Hindus in general celebrate the festival, Kashmiri Hindus celebrate it on *trayodaśī*, or one day earlier, the reason being that the *linga* appeared on the thirteenth day of the dark fortnight of the month of Phalguna (February-March) at *pradoṣakāla* or the dusk of early night. Called *Herath* (Sanskrit '*Hararātri*') in Kashmiri, it has also been described as *Bhairavotsava* in Tantric texts as on this occasion Bhairava (Shiva) and Bhairavi, his Shakti or cosmic energy, are propitiated through Tantric worship. The legend of the origin of the worship was explained to me by Pandit Kashi Nath Handoo, an octogenarian expert of Shivarātri rituals, who

now lives in Jammu following the exodus of Kashmiri Hindus from Kashmir. It was on this occasion, he explained, that Vaṭuka Bhairava and Rāma (or Raman) Bhairava began to sing the praises of the *linga* after failing to discover its beginning or end. Vaṭuka Bhairava, represented by a pitcher full of water in which walnuts are kept for soaking, is also worshiped along with Shiva, Parvati, Kumara, Ganesha, their *gaṇas* or attendant deities, *yoginīs* and *kṣetrapālas* (guardians of the quarters) – all represented by clay images. The soaked walnuts are later distributed as *naivedya*.

The Pūjā comprises elaborate Tantric rituals which involve observance of a fast during the day and performance of a *yāga* or fire sacrifice at night. Choice dishes, mainly non- vegetarian but also vegetarian as an option, are cooked and partaken of after being symbolically offered to the deities as sacrificial food. This is essential for everyone, the related texts emphasize, as those who partake of it achieve progress and prosperity in life. These who do not break their fast after the Pūjā by partaking of the sacrificial food are bound to go to hell or take rebirth after death as lowly animals besides suffering in this life. The Kashmiri Hindus celebrate *Shiva Caturdaśī* too but after performing the Pūjā on *trayodaśī*, and as a day of feasting instead of fasting. For them the festival ends on *amāvasyā* or the last day of the dark fortnight of Phalguna. It appears that Shiva in the form of Svacchanda Bhairava was the main deity worshipped by the Kashmiris during *Herath*, though this is not specifically mentioned in the concerned manuals now.

There are several other festivals also which are peculiar to Kashmiri Hindus alone, like Jyeshṭha Ashtamī on which the Goddess Rāgyī or Rāgnyā, a manifestation of Durga, is worshipped at Kshīr Bhavānī, *Sonth* or the festival heralding spring; *Navreh*, the New Year's Day of Kashmiri Hindus according to their Saptarshi calendar, *Anta Tsodāh* or Ananta Caturdarshī, *Kāva Punim* or the full moon day dedicated to the ancestors on which crows are fed in the belief that ancestors come in their form to receive the offerings, *Gora Tray* or *Gaurī Tritīyā* celebrated on the third day of the bright fortnight of Magha (February-March) to worship the goddess Saraswati and *Tiky Tsorum,* a Shakta festival on which Tripura Sundarī is worshipped.

There are some Pūjās which were quite popular in Kashmir till the first few decades of the 20th century but are quite forgotten now, rituals and all. Among these can be included the Vishnu Pañcāyatana Pūjā, which involved worshipping the five main deities of the Hindu pantheon – Vishnu, Shiva, Devi (Durga), Ganesha and

Surya – with the image of the devotee's favourite deity in the centre. Another ritual, the Pārthiveshvara Pūjā, which is at once a ritual and an art, has become very rare in the circumstances in which the community is placed at present. I discussed various aspects of the Pūjā, like its history, procedure, duration as well as its features as an art with some of the few adepts in Jammu who still perform it. The practice consists of making an instant *Shivalinga* of pure clay together with images of Kumāra, Ganapati, Umā and Ekādasha Rudras. The clay is to be obtained only from sacred places like a *devasthāna* (a place of worship) or a hillside or mountainside. Kneaded into a dough-like stuff using water, milk, curds and ghee, the clay is moulded into the shape of a *linga* and images of the other deities. A hole is made at the top of the *linga* and mercury, also known as *haribīja,* is put into it, after which the hole is hermetically sealed. The *linga* is placed on a *bhadrapīṭha* made of wood and worshipped with white flowers – preferably *dhatūra, bilvapatra* and *dūb* or runner grass. It is smeared with sandalwood paste, camphor and *bhasma* and some seasonal fruit is offered to it. The *linga* and the other images have to be artistically made. It is interesting to note that the Pūjā had become popular in Kashmir during the Muslim rule when performance of congregational worship became difficult for Kashmiri Hindus because of religious persecution. As they could not visit temples and Shivālayas for fear of being identified as Hindus, individual worship of Parthiveshvara came handy to them. The clay images could be easily immersed into a river immediately after the worship without attracting any notice.

Fear of religious persecution gave rise to another interesting practice – worship of certain trees as gods. The trees that were thus worshipped were the *bran* or elm (a tree with palmate leaves), the mulberry and even the cedar. Before being worshipped they were smeared with vermilion for consecration as deities, the *bran* representing Ganesha, the mulberry the Bhairavas and the cedar or pine Kali. The tradition probably goes back to much earlier times. There was a mulberry tree even at the shrine of the Mother Goddess Ragnyā at Kshir Bhavani or Tulmul before the present temple was erected there in Maharaja Pratap Singh's time (1885-1925), though an image of the Goddess was placed beneath it. Muslim rulers destroyed most of the ancient temples and forbade construction of new ones, particularly during the rule of zealots like Sikandar Butshikan and the Afghan governors. This situation continued till Kashmir passed into the hand of the Sikhs and then Dogra rulers. It

was under the latter that temple construction activity revived in Kashmir. Most of the existing temples belong to the period of their rule. It may be noted that even during their rule it took a tremendous effort and years of litigation for the Kashmiri Hindus to regain control of the Shankaracharya temple and Durga Nag shrine in Srinagar. In such adverse circumstances worshipping the *bran* or the mulberry looked like an easier alternative to building a temple.

Among the Kashmiri Hindus, ritual art has been an essential element of a religious ceremony and often the focal point of a rite. Executed by the Brahmins, mostly the priests, this art lacks the character of tribal or rural art, but some forms of it have undoubtedly characteristics of folk art and can be construed as such. This is particularly true of the circular designs executed mostly by women on the ground. Known as *vyūg,* these designs are drawn freehand by them at sacraments related to different stages of life, for instance at *Shrāna Sŏndar* or purification rite of a newborn child, at the sacred thread investiture of a boy and at time of marriage. It is only in the last case that *vyūg* seems to have survived now with the bride and the bridegroom made to stand on it on the day of marriage – perhaps because of some magical purposes. It is, or rather it was, executed with coloured powders, usually rice paste, dried and powdered leaves, turmeric powder and other natural materials. The art dates back to very ancient times as it has been mentioned in the Nilamata Purana as *bhūmi śobhā,* indicating that it must have been of a decorative nature in the beginning like *alpanā.* Another kind of a ritual circle drawn on the ground was the *Hāramanḍul,* which represented the Sun god or Hora. It was drawn on the seventh day of the bright fortnight of Ashāḍha (July-August) when the sun is in the *Ārdrā nakṣatra. Krūl* is another ritual art form executed exclusively by women (usually the paternal aunt) on the entrance door of a house. It comprises of floral motifs, usually flower – laden ramblers, painted in a stylistic way at the time of marriage or *yajñopavīta* ceremony. Obviously, these motifs are considered auspicious. An essential element of the *Divagon* ceremony performed at the time of marriage of a boy or a girl and at sacred thread investiture of a boy is painting of *divtamūn* or ritualistic drawings executed with vermilion on a while background on the wall. These drawings show mother goddesses, who are invoked for blessings, in their abodes in *Nandanavana* (the garden of paradise) represented by *kalpavrikṣa* with a *ṣaṭcakra* at the base. A *jyotistambha* (pillar of light) or *jwālā-linga* with a *ṣaṭcakra* base is also drawn at this ceremony at

the head of the *agnikuṇḍa* with a rectangular configuration over it showing various *ayudhas* (weapons) topped by a *patākā* (flag). There are several other forms of ritual drawings also. For instance, (1) the *ṭeky tāl* or patterns of *śrīcakra* or *cakra* and *bindu* drawn on ladies' headgear or paper – patterns of these motif attached to it; (2) floral or geometric patterns drawn on the ground at various ceremonies for placing *kalaśas*, earthen lamps and other ritual objects; and (3) *cittāvāsa* or a geometric pattern representing the *māyājāla* drawn at the head of the pyre at the time of cremation.

One of the most important, and beautiful, forms of the ritual arts of the Kashmiri Hindus was the scroll paintings known as *gora tray*. Not many years back these paintings were prepared by the family priest and given to children and newly married brides on the *Gaurī Tritīyā* day on which Saraswati was worshipped. Each scroll had the figure of the goddess of Learning painted at the centre along with a hymn in her praise. Its borders were decorated with different folk motifs. The aniconic terracotta images worshipped at Shivaratri can also be considered to be a form of folk art. Made by Muslim potters for their Hindu patrons – the artisans having converted to Islam – these had a bearing on the economy also, though peripheral.

Fascinating as these ritual art forms are, they are vanishing fast as a consequence of the displacement of the Pandit minority from Kashmir, some of them having already disappeared. No attempt has so far been made to study them in any manner, this being the first endeavour to explore and bring to light this unique but totally ignored area of study. In delving into this and into various aspects of the complex ritual traditions of Kashmiri Hindus, my purpose is not merely to derive scholastic pleasure but to unfold a remarkable cultural vista that may otherwise be totally lost to the world. And though in preparing this book I virtually had to start from a scratch, my efforts can be said to have not been wasted if I am able to draw attention to it as an area of great importance and a challenge for socio-cultural and anthropological research.

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CHAPTER 2

Primary Texts and Sources of Inquiry

Laugākshī Gṛhyasūtra

Laugākshi's Gṛhya-Sūtra-s or ceremonial formulas constitute the earliest and most important text on which the ritual system followed by Kashmiri Hindus is said to be based, both in structure and content. It is related to the Kāṭhaka redaction of the Black (Krishṇa) Yajurveda to which the Brahmins of Kashmir belong, and is, therefore also called the Kāṭhaka *gṛhya-sūtra,* having its genesis in the *Kāṭhaka Samhitā,* also said to be a work of Laugakshi Muni. In terms of historical development, this ritual system seems to be quite ancient as it has features that are predominantly Vedic. Yet it is difficult to say when exactly did the sage Laughakshi live and compose his aphorisms which have remained the core of Kashmiri Hindu sacramental rites and ceremonies through the ages. Kashmiri ritual experts like Pandit Keshav Nath Shastri put the Laugākshi Gṛhya-sūtra-s as far back in time as 6000 B.C., but it is highly probable that they were compiled sometime between 500–200 B.C. when, according to Veena Das, the *Gṛhyasūtra* literature came into existence.[1]

Not much is known about Laugākshi, except that his name occurs with Gobhila and other *Gṛhyasūtra* writers in works like the *Ślokatarpaṇa* of Agastya, which is "much in use in Kashmir even."[2] His real name, according to Pandit Madhusudan Kaul Shastri, is Laukākshi, Laugākshi being its Kashmirised form.[3] The name

Laukākshi, has been given by Vamana and Jayaditya in their joint work *Kāshikā* (640 A.D.) and in the *Nyāsa* (700-750 AD) by Jinendrabuddhi, Pandit Madhusudan Kaul further informs us.[4] He was the son of Laukāksha and had a large number of pupils who were called 'Laukākshas'. Besides the Laugākshi Gṛhyasūtras, he is also said to have authored three more works: (i) Śrauta Śāstras of Kāṭhaka School; (ii) Gṛhyapaddhati, and (iii) Laugākshi Smṛti.

Although the ordainments of Laugākshi contained in his Gṛhyasūtras have governed the ritualistic behaviour of Kashmiri Hindus from birth to death for centuries, and probably covered a much larger area than just the Kashmir Valley, its text has hardly received the attention it deserves from ritual experts, W. Caland being the only foreign scholar who was prompted to study and commentate on it in English as 'Kāṭhaka Gṛhyasūtras'. That was way back in 1919, after which Pandit Madhusdan Kaul Shastri, a Kashmiri scholar, brought out its critical edition in two volumes under the Kashmir Sanskrit Texts Series (KSTS) in 1928 and 1934 respectively. Later, another ritual expert from Kashmir, Pandit Keshav Bhatt Jyotshi brought out on his own a whole series of books and booklets on different rituals based on the Sūtras for the benefit of those who adhere to the Kāṭhaka School of Black Yajurveda in Kashmir.

A number of exegetical works have been written on Laugākshi Grihyasūtra by scholars from Kashmir, the earliest among them being the *Vivarṇa* by Aditya Darshana. The other two works are the *Pañcikā* or *Paddhati* of the *gṛhyasūtras* by Brahmanabala and the *Bhāśyam* of Devapala on the *sūtras* and the *mantras* related to them. Aditya Darshana was Veda Darshana's son and a pupil to Madhavavrata. As he directly refers to the customs and rites of Kashmiri Brahmins quite frequently, he appears to have been a Kashmiri himself both by birth and actual residence. Pandit Madhusudan Kaul places him in a period "not far removed" from middle of Muslim rule in Kashmir, that is, sometimes between the 14th and the 15th century when Kashmir could still "boast of a number of Vedic scholars and experts in the *Pūrva-mīmāṁsa* school."[5] His *Vivaraṇa* is just a gloss on the text, as is revealed to us in Caland's edition of Kāṭhaka Sūtras, and not a full-fledged commentary.

Aditya Darshana laments the regrettable condition in which Laugākshi's Gṛhyasūtras had been lying for centuries much because of the negligence of the Brahmin priests who officiated at sacrifices and were supposed to be the "custodians

of the sacred literature". Pandit Madhusudan Kaul Shastri quotes him as having observed in his treatise on food sacrifices called *Pāka-yajña-vivritti* as follows:-

> "All the officiating priests are, as a rule, found devoted to the superficial reading of the Vedas, They never try to learn the meaning of a syllable from them. They think that their object of life is gained simply through the mere muttering of the Mantras, and are, like the autumnal clouds, fruitlessly uproarious in their hearts. They carry on their conversation with one another saying – 'Why to bother ourselves with the meaning of the scriptural texts?' and cut jokes at those who take to the critical study of the Vedas in right earnest. Not knowing the meaning of the Mantras, they undertake in a careless manner the religious performances, such as are only within the competence of the learned, leading to the undesirable consequences. Some of them after having a very imperfect knowledge of this or that Brahmaṇa, pose for the learned and engage themselves eternally in the sacrificial performances."[6]

Devapala appears to confirm this in his *Bhāśyam* of Laugakshi's Grihyasutra-s saying that "the thread regarding the tradition and Mantras of Yajurveda was broken for long."[7] The situation continued to worsen in every passing century and today very few members of the now displaced Kashmiri Pandit community – even among the priestly class – are aware of Laugākshi and his Sūtras or of the Kāṭhaka redaction of the Yajurveda. No study on these Sūtras has come up so far and the two volumes of the sacred text critically edited by Pandit Madhusudan Kaul Shastri, as well as Caland's translation, have gone out of print. The *Vivarṇa* and the *Pañcikā* of the Sūtras have not been yet published, nor is it known whether their manuscript copies supposed to have been preserved by the State Research and Archives Department still exist or not. The *Pañcikā* or *Paddhati,* it may be stated, is a kind of manual of the *gṛhyasūtras* giving rules and regulations regarding performance of the rites and ceremonies mentioned in the Sūtras and supplementing the instructions given in the former in detail, with additional and detailed information and relevant quotations from other *gṛhyasūtras* belonging to Krishṇa Yajurveda as well as from other sacred texts.

Pandit Madhusudan Kaul Shastri brought out his critical edition of Laugākshi's Gṛhyasūtras together with the *Bhāśyam* of its commentator Devapala. Both the texts and portions of the commentary run into one another and are so inextricably

intermixed that the erudite Pandit managed to distinguish between the two after considerable effort and "with the help of numerous reference books now available on the Vedic literature."[8] Devapala's *bhāśya* interprets both the text and the related mantras at one place. He criticizes here and there, says Pandit Madhusudan Kaul Shastri, the interpretations of the Sūtras by his predecessors, Aditya Darshana and others.[9]

Devapala, or rather his ancestors, originally belonged to Jallandhar, but came and settled in Kashmir at a place called Jayapura, which has been identified with modern Zovur. It was at this place, seven miles to the south-east of Srinagar, that he composed his *Bhāśyaṁ*, as he himself reveals. His father Haripala, he tells us, was a Vedic scholar of his time. Apart from the *Bhāśyaṁ* of the Laugākshi Gṛhyasūtra-s, Devapala also wrote a commentary on the Yogasūtras of Patañjali and a hymn in praise of Vishnu. The writer of the *Pañcikā*, Brahmanabala, probably lived before Devapala as he does not refer to him or his *bhāśyam* anywhere in his manual.

On analyzing the structure and contents of the Laugākshi Grihyasūtra-s, we find that following the general pattern, they comprise both the *vaitānika* or public rituals and the *gṛhya* or domestic rituals as such. In the critical edition brought out by Pandit Madhusudan Kaul Shastri, the first volume contains 40 *kāndikās* or chapters of which 39 deal with *vaitānika* or *śrauta* rituals while one of the *kāṇdikās*, is purely exegetical. In the 2nd volume too, one of the *kāṇdikās* is exegetical, while the remaining 32 deal with domestic rituals. On the whole, it agrees in essence with what constitutes the core in the other *gṛhyasūtras*, the differences being only marginal in nature. This is the case both with the main *śrauta* as well as *gṛhya* rituals, one of the major differences relating to the order of the rites. Laugākshi begins with the initiation rites like the vows of the *brahmachārī* or the religious student while most others start with marriage rites. As we have pointed out in the introductory chapter, the prominent *śrauta* sacrifices given in Laugākshi Grihyasūtras include the *Dārśa Pūrnimā Ishṭi* – an important and elaborate Vedic ritual related to the New Moon and Full Moon day, the five *pāka-yajñas* or cooked food sacrifices and the *aṣṭakas* or rituals pertaining to passage of an individual "from the state of the living human being to that of an ancestor". One of the most important features of the *gṛhya* rituals given by Laugākshi is what can be called the ritualization of the passage of time, symbolizing the concept of fertility, prosperity, life and death. These *sūtras* are

concerned, among other things, with problems of conversion of the natural forces of fertility into social events of marriage and child-birth, as Dass points out, "as well as the provision of an intellectual mediation to the phenomenon of death...."[9]

As the Hindu view of domestic life as presented in the *gṛhyasūtras* is cyclic, it does not actually matter which domestic ceremony is made the starting point – that related to the period of the studentship of the Brahmachari, or marriage which is regarded as especially important because "the cultus of the domestic sacrificial fire" begins with it. No *gṛhya* ceremony can be performed without the domestic fire being first established, and it can be established only at the end of the studentship period, designated as *samāvartana,* or at the time of marriage. Like the Hiraṇykeshī-sūtra, the Laugākshi Grihyasūtra also follows the first of these two orders, beginning with the vows and duties of the *brahmachārī* during the period of studentship. In any case, what follows are the domestic ceremonies that centre around the sacred fire that every householder has to establish on entering the second important epoch of his life when he set-up his household. The ritual acts which a householder is then enjoined to perform by Laugākshi include the daily fire sacrifices at morning and at evening, fortnightly fire sacrifices on the new moon and the full-moon days, various kinds of *bali* sacrifices on occasions like harvesting and a group of sacrifices during the months of winter to propitiate the ancestors. There is another important group of ceremonies performed at various stages of life like marriage, pregnancy, childbirth, naming of the child, tonsure, investiture of sacred thread etc., which are known as initiation rituals. Cremation rites are generally excluded from these ceremonies as these are strictly regarded as belonging to the domestic category. Laugākshi does not at all deal with the rites of cremation, relegating them not even to an appendix. Together with the ritual acts that are to be performed by the householder regularly at certain times of the year, Laugākshi, like other authors of the *gṛhya* texts describes various ceremonies, which though related to ritualistic matters, are not connected with any fixed position in the ritual system. For instance, there are rites related to choosing a piece of ground by the newly married couple to build a house or those connected with agriculture, raising of cattle, or rites for obtaining special wishes, for averting misfortune or evading bad luck and calamities portended by events like a pigeon flying into the house and building its nest there, rituals for mounting a chariot, crossing a river, oblations for curing sickness, penances for a student breaking the vow of chastity

and other kinds of expiations, and so on. Not all these ceremonies are, however, centered round the sacred domestic fire.

Starting with *brahmacharya-vratāni*, or vows to be observed by the *brahmachārī* during his student days in the 1st *kāṇḍikā*, Laugākshi describes *samāvartana* or the end of studentship in the 13th *kāṇḍikā* and then proceeds to describe in the 13th *kaṇḍikā* the various *pākayajñas* or cooked food sacrifices that a married couple is supposed to perform after establishment of the domestic fire, and it is after this description that he deals with *kanyāvaraṇam* or marriage and the rituals immediately preceding and following it. In the second volume, the *upanayana* ceremony and the *pākayajñas* are, described again, rather than placing them at one place in a definite order. This shows that Laugākshi's assignment of rites to different chapters has an element of arbitrariness and repetitiveness about it. On the whole, however, his text gives an arrangement based on the nature of the ceremonies described, as is the case with the texts by authors like Āshvālayana, Gobhilā, Shankhyāyana, Pāraskara, Āpastamba, Hiranyakeshi, Khadira and others. Though in many instances we find in Laugākshi considerable variations from these according to regional customs and usages, as well as differences in the schools to which they belong, there is a basic agreement in all these so far as their main traits ate concerned. Laugākshi divides the various *pākayajñas* into four classes: the *hūta*, where the offerings are poured into the domestic fire; the *āhūta* where the offerings are made to the fire and presents are given to the Brahmanas after which one receives presents from others; the *prahūta* where rice balls or *piṇḍas* are offered to the ancestors and presents are given to Brahmanas and others; and the *prahūta* where offerings are made to the Brahmanas as food.[10] According to Charles Malmound, this is "a distribution which may coincide with that of the four *mahāyajñas*,"[11] Rajabali Pandey includes the *saṁskāras* from *vivāha* (marriage) to *sīmāntonnayanaṁ* (parting of hair) in the first group, *upanayana* and *samāvartana* in the second; *saṁskāras* from the *jātakarma* (birth ceremonies) to the *caula* or *cūḍakāraṇa* in the third.[12] This classification is found in Shankhāyana and Pāraskara too, but Ashvālayana mentions only three of the four classes – the *hūta*, *ahūta* and *prahūta*. The Baudhāyana Gṛhyasūtra, however, classifies the *pākayajñas* under seven classes and so does Gautama. Baudhāyana's classification includes the above mentioned three-fold division as well as the *śūlagāva* or the spit-ox sacrifice, the *bali* offerings, the *agrahāyaṇa* and *aśṭaka* sacrifices within the ambit

of the cooked food scarifies. But whatever be the placement of the food scarifies in "the ritual ensemble", there is a remarkable affinity between the initiation sacraments on *saṁskāra* rituals given by Laugākshī and authors of other *gṛhya* texts so far as the essentials are concerned, the differences being only in the details.

Though the number of initiations, or 'bodily' *saṁskāras* as Rajbali Pandey calls them, vary in the *Gṛhyasūtras* from twelve to eighteen, Laugākshi includes most of the standard sixteen in his list, viz, *vivāha, garbhādāna, sīmāntonnayana, puṁsvana, jātakarma, nāmakaraṇa, annaprāśana, cūḍakaraṇa, upanayana, godāna* or *keśānta, samāvartana saṁskāras* etc., though not in that order. There are also minor childhood *saṁskāras* like *āditya darśana* and *candra darśana* or showing the sun and the moon to a child for the first time. These commonly described sacraments have been best summed up by Max Müller in the following manner:

> "Then (i.e. after the marriage) following the Saṁskāras, the rites to be performed at the conception of a child, at various periods before his birth, the ceremony of naming the child, of carrying him out to see the sun, of feeding him, of cutting his hair, and lastly of investing him as a student, and handing him to a Guru under whose care he is to study the sacred writings, that is to say, to learn them by heart, and to perform all the offices of a Brahṁacharin, or religious student."[13]

Along with "this great group of acts which accompany the domestic life from marriage to the studentship and *samāvartana* of the child sprung from wedlock", there is a second group of ritual acts which the Laugākshi Grihyasutras have in common with the other texts. These are to be performed at fixed points of the year, after the setting up of the sacred domestic fire, "which forms the necessary preliminary to all sacred acts". Thus we have the *Shṛāvaṇī, Ashvāyujī, Agrahāyana* and *Phālgunī* – four festivals, celebrated in the series of festivals for well-being and good luck. These are followed by the *Aṣṭaka* festivals during the last months of the year when oblations are given to ancestors. *Paśukalpas* or various animal scarifies, *śrāddhas* and the *Nandīmukha śrāddhas* also belong to the categories which receive similar treatment in various ritual texts. The descriptions of these *gṛhya* ceremonies by Laugākshi are more detailed and elaborate, and therefore complicated at places, which has made his collection of *sūtras* quite voluminous and has added several dimensions to them which we do not find in other *sūtras* of the domestic cult.

There are striking similarities between several *sūtras* of Laugākshi and of the Mānava and Vāmana Grihyasūtras. This is obviously due to the fact that all these *gṛhyasūtras* belong to the Black Yajurveda (B.Y.). While the Laugākshi or Kāṭhaka Grihyasūtras are related to the *Kāṭhaka Samhitā* of B.Y., the other two are connected to the Maitrāyanī Samhitā. Pandit Madhusudan Kaul Shastri has given examples of several parallel passages from these texts to show their mutual relationship. For instance, the Laugākshi Grihyasūtra prescribes vocal and instrumental music as well as dancing as an essential part of domestic ceremonies like marriage and *upananyana*, so does the Vārāha Grihyasūtra. Similarly, the description of the ritual of *vatsotsarga* or setting a bull at liberty given in Laugākshi Grihyasūtra agrees almost word for word with its description in the *sūtras* of Shankhyāyana and Pāraskara.[14] According to Hermann Oldenberg, word for word agreement in such cases suggests that these portions may have been taken from a common source, probably an older Grihyasūtra which has now been lost.[15]

As is the case with other *gṛhyasūtras*, the sacrifices described by Laugākshi can also be divided into three categories: *nitya* or obligatory, *kāmya* or optional – those performed for fulfillment of wish, and *prāyaścitta* or expiatory. Of the last category, there are several *kṛccharas* mentioned in Laugākshi, some of which are penances for a student who has broken his vow of chastity.

The Laugākshi Grihyasūtra has many peculiar features and traits of its own which are both important and interesting from the point of view of *deśācāra* or regional customs and practices. Thus, there is a ceremony resembling the present *divagon* ceremony of the Kashmiri Pandits prescribed to be held on the eve of the marriage at which the bride to be is seated on a quadrangular seat and given a sacred bath, with four women who are not widows, holding a porous cloth over her head and pouring scented water. The ceremony is to be performed with cooked food oblations to be thrown into the fire. The bride to be is to be fully adorned with ornaments and made to wear special clothes amidst chanting of mantras and to the accompaniment of instrumental and vocal music by women.

Laugākshi, however, lays down the same interesting method of testing the worth of a bride to be chosen for marriage as the other *gṛhyasūtras*. Eight clods of earth were to be brought from a sacrificial altar, a pool of water, a cow-pen, a furrow, a road- crossing, a gambling place, a crematorium and a barren spot and the girl asked

to touch any one of them. If she chose any one of the first four, she was considered to be fit for marriage. If, somehow, she touched one of the last four, she was to be rejected.[16]

Another interesting feature of the marriage ceremony is also worth mentioning. According to the Laugākshi Gṛhya, when the bridegroom starts for the bride's house, a sister of his catches hold of the hem of his upper garment from behind with a weapon in hand and escorts him up to a tank.[17]

We do not find this custom mentioned in any other *gṛhya* text.

Laugākshi, like other Grihyasūtras, describes the *putreśṭi* sacrifice for those who desire to have a male child.[18] One of the *kāmya* rituals, it has been categorized as a *pākayajña* in which six oblations are to be poured into the sacrificial fire along with six cooked food sacrifices. The offerings are to be made in the *sviṣṭa-kṛta agni*.

Towards the close of the Laugākshi Gṛhya we have a festival solely devoted to the welfare and happiness of young maidens. It is a *yajña* or sacrifice performed on the full-moon day and is called *Rākāholaka,* with Rākā or the goddess of the full-moon as its presiding deity.[19] Unmarried girls desirous of obtaining good husbands were to take part in the festival in which oblations of clarified butter were offered and mantras related to Indrani and other goddesses were recited.

Devapala, the commentator of Laugākshi Grihyasūtra, has explained and interpreted in great detail not only the *sūtras* but also various mantras which have to be recited with the numerous sacraments and ceremonies described by Laugākshi. The mantras, which have been taken mainly from the Rigveda and Yajurveda and from the *Mantra Brāhmaṇa* and other compilations, have sometimes been given in extended form by the author but mostly referred to in what is known as the *pratīka* or shortened form giving only the cue words. The full wording of the mantras that have been avoided by Laugākshi, have, however, been cited by his commentator. The author of the *sūtras* perhaps presupposes knowledge of these mantras on the part of the performer of the sacrifices as they incorporate mantras out of the Rigveda or the Yajurveda which are of general applicability. Some of them are also found in the Sāmaveda. Kauner points to the possibility of existence of a general *gṛhya samhitā* at a time when was there was no Sāmaveda as yet, but Oldenberg strongly opposes this conjecture.[20]

The Nilamata Purāna

One cannot say with certainty how long and to what extent did the rites and ceremonies ordained in the Laugākshi Sūtras determine the ritualistic behaviour of the early Kashmiri society. Nor can it be said how far did the regional customs and traditions influence and modify their observance, and what exactly constituted these local accretions that clustered around the Vedic core, though Devapala, the commentator of the Sūtras, has given an indication or two about them. The Sūtras themselves, though some of them are of a hoary origin, hint at places about the kind of the people who followed their ordainments and about their social and cultural life and beliefs and concerns. However, with the passage of time, things started changing, both perceptibly as well as imperceptibly, and gradually new liturgical features and patterns emerged to suit the requirements of a subsequent age. By the time of the Nilamata Purāna, which commemorates the mixing and commingling of various races, the religious complexion of the Kashmiri society had quite changed with the introduction of Puranic and Tantric elements as well as addition of Naga cultic practices. The Vedic gods and goddesses who were offered oblations and praises for obtaining spiritual blessings as well as mundane benefits slowly disappeared from the scene they once dominated, with the exception of Indra, Varuna, Yama, Agni and one or two more gods, through their status too was reduced. They were replaced by a new pantheon of Puranic deities – a whole host of them feminine. Cults centering round Vishnu and his incarnations and Shiva and his family (viz. Uma, Kartikeya, Ganesha) occupied the important places in the new liturgical order along with the worship of Brahma, Surya, Kubera, Baladeva and numerous folk-deities including several Nagas. Vaishnava cults appear to have been more popular in the Kashmir of the Nilamata Purāna era, but the cult of Shiva is also quite dominant. Buddha is included as an incarnation of Vishnu.

Among the different Vaishnava cults mentioned in the Nilamata, reference to the non-Vedic and somewhat Tantric *Bhāgavatas* and *Pancharātras* in connection with the worship of Vishnu is quite significant. The popularity of the Shaiva pantheon – Shiva, Uma, Ganesha or Vinayaka and Kartikeya or Kumara and their various manifestations – seems to have increased in the later part of the Nilamata era. But of even greater interest is the wide prevalence of the cult of goddesses of whom quite a number seem to have been popular hilly-goddesses, later identified with Uma and

Lakshmi. Uma is the foremost among the female deities whose worship is prescribed in the Nilamata. Kashmir, in fact is regarded in the Nilamata Purāna as the very embodiment of Uma who is also shown taking the form of the river Vitasta and is referred to in her various manifestations as Durga, Sati, Bhadrakali, Shyama etc. According to Nilamata, offerings of flowers, garlands, fruits, vegetable, jewels, incense, lamps and even different kinds of drinks were to be made to them.[21] Other goddesses who were worshipped in the age of Nilamata included Lakshmî, who we have already referred to, Shāradā, Shachî, Sîtā, Rajñyī, Diti, Aditi, Sinivāli, Kuhu, Rākā, Anumati, Ayati, Niyati, Prajñā, Mati, Velā, Dhārinī, Yashodā, Devakī, Prithvī, Sureshvarī, Bhimā, Kapiñjalī, Bhadreshvarī, Chakreshvarī, Gautameshī, Chanḍikā, Gavākshī, Suvijayā, Shakunī and Brahmachārinī.[22] Besides these, there is a whole group of river goddesses regarded as deities and some of them identified with Umā, Lakshmî, Shachî and Diti. Interestingly, Shāradā, the goddess of learning, appears to have been identified with Durga in the Nilamata and so is the case with the *Shāradā Māhātmya* in which we come across the local traditions of offering of meat to the goddess Shāradā.

The Nilamata Purana thus represents a stage when the Vedic cult of sacrificial rituals had lost its significance and was being replaced by the Purānic-Āgamic religious practices, except perhaps in case of basic initiation sacraments. The emphasis had now shifted from the *yajñas* or fire-sacrifices to *pūjā* or worship of images of deities, *vratas* or religious observances, *utsavas* or festivals and *yātrās* or pilgrimages. *Japa* (recital of the name of a deity), *upavāsa* (fast), *homa* (fire ritual), *dāna* (charity), and *snāna* (sacred bath) were also constituents of this new mode of worship. The *utsavas,* of which a galore is described in the Nilamata, the *yātrās* or pilgrimages and the *pūjās* come as simple religious, mostly congregational, acts substituting the lengthy and complicated *śrauta* sacrifices, and having many elements of folk-religion in them though not totally devoid of ritualistic actions. Some of the festivals though outwardly having a religious facade are actually associated with agriculture, seasonal changes or commemoration of civilizational or historical developments.

Thus *Kṛṣyārambha,* is essentially an agricultural ceremony which marks the commencement of cultivation with ploughing of the field and growing of the seed. On this occasion, celebrated amidst much signing and dancing, the goddess Earth, Baladeva, Mahadeva, Vamadeva, the sun and the moon gods, Parjanya, Indra,

Pracheta, Rama, Lakshmana, Sita, Shesha, Brahma, Kashyapa, Vahni, Vayu, Gagana – a whole host of deities are worshipped on an auspicious day to be selected by the Brahmanas after the 8th day of the dark fortnight of Chaitra. Two bulls, a cow and a horse are also to be worshipped for ritualistic purposes.[23] *Yāvagrāyaṇa* celebrated when barley ripens in the field, and *navānna vidhāna,* the ceremony of new grains, performed on the arrival of fresh crops are also festivals associated with agriculture. Both these festivals are marked by worship of gods and manes, feeding of Brahmanas and recitation of Vedic texts as their ritual components, while listening to vocal and instrumental music and eating preparations of barley and giving gifts of rice and other grains constitute the folk elements. Quite interesting is *Śyāmādevī Pūjana,* a festival at which Shyāmā or the personified vine creeper is worshipped when the grapes are ripe. Eating of grapes, and, of course offering the first fruits to the Brahmanas, are its other features. Though Shyāmā is identified with Umā, she may have been originally a folk-goddess and the festival could well have had a Bacchanalian touch as suggested by the dancing and musical performances which were a part of the celebrations.

Festivals like the *Nava Saṁvatsara Mahotsava, Nava Himapātotsava, Iramāñjarî Pūjana, Uttarāyaṇa* and *Dakshiṇāyaṇa,* mentioned in the Nilamata Pūrana are related to seasonal changes or changes in the course of the sun. Śrāvaṇî Utsava also falls almost in the same category, while quite a number of the festivals are occasions of social rejoicing with provision for singing and dancing, and more interestingly, for dramatic performances. There is not much ritualistic action associated with them despite the seemingly religious setting. However, of the sixty-three *vratas, utsavas* and other festivals and ceremonies described in the Nilamata, most are religious in form as well as spirit with the ritualistic elements also present.

Devapūjā or the Pūjā rituals prescribed in the Nilamata to please the sacred developed to some extent from Vedic worship and were also borrowed considerably from the modes of worship prevalent amongst the aboriginal tribes, points out Dr. Ved Ghai. The Vedic element continued in the form of recitation of Vedic passages, but the procedure was much the same that gradually crystallized later as the *ṣodaśa-upacāra-pūjā,* or worship service in sixteen steps as Musashi Tachikava characterizes it,[24] and is mainly according to the Purānic norm. According to Dr. Ghai, it has the following as its constituents: "Bathing the image; offering unguents; clothes;

ornaments; water of honour; eatables etc. ; burning incense; lighting lamps; observing vigil at night and singing praises of the deity."[25]

The Nilamata does not give details of the procedures involved in the religious ceremonies or rites, it prescribes except in a few cases like the *Devotthāna* festival where too it gives only the broad guidelines. Spread over a period of five days, the *Devotthāna* or the festival of Awakening of Vishnu has features like observance of vigil at night, awakening of the God with songs, dances, musical concerts, dramatic performances, earth-decorations etc., and bathing of the image of the deity "in accordance with the procedure of the Pancharatra with butter, oil, honey, curds, milk, five products of the cow, various kinds of cosmetics, perfumes, clays and making gifts of golden pitchers."[26] This is a clear confirmation of the prevalence of the Pañ carātra rituals in the Nilamata era, accentuating the transition from the Vedic to not only Purānic but also Āgamic practices. Along with the various kinds of Pūjās, the Vedic sacrificial cult can also be seen substituted by *yātrās* or pilgrimages to places held sacred to different deities, with the Nilamata fixing different sacred dates for different *yātrās*. Many of the festivals or the *yātrās* were to performed with taking out a procession of the deity as a feature. The *homa* or the fire-ritual too was performed, in particular, the post-Vedic *Lakṣahoma* or *Koṭihoma* mentioned in the Purānas, but mostly an act of worship was equated in merit to various Vedic fire-scarifies. Thus most of the Puranic-Tantric practices introduced in the Nilamata as replacements of the Vedic rituals display a tendency of avoiding violence by promising "the attainment of same merits and awards".

The Bhringīsha Saṁhitā

Like the Nilamata Purāna, the Bhringīsha Saṁhitā too incorporates various *Tīrtha Māhātmyas* (glorification of sacred places) in its text and marks a subsequent stage in the development of the ritualistic traditions of Kashmir. As stated earlier, it was the stage when the stress was more on congregational or group religious activity than on individual acts of worship. The setting for this activity was provided by the shrines, temples and places of pilgrimages to which people thronged on set sacred dates and sacred occasions for propitiation of the gods. As the *Mahātmyas* incorporated in the Bhringīsha Saṁhitā date from the 5th to the 12th century of the Vikram era, it is difficult to determine the exact date of its composition. Though Georg Biihler and

Aurel Stein consider it to be a work of rather recent origin, they nevertheless accept it as a valuable source for the study of the sacred topography of Kashmir and regard it as a "very rare and valuable work."[27]

Dr. Yashpal Khajuria, who has edited its Ranbir Singh Research Institute edition, on the other hand, believes that the composition of the Saṁhitā must have begun in the 5th century of the Vikram era and completed by the 12th century of the same era a most of the *Mahātmyas* incorporated into it seem to suggest.[28] Dr. Khajuria is of the view that Maharishi Bhringisha, whose name is associated with Kashyapa, Shandilya and other ancient sages must have in originally begun the *Saṁhitā*, but later on others belonging to his preceptorial lineage must have made further additions to it and given it its present form.[29] This view does not appear to be far from plausible, though interpolations after the 12th century of the Vikram era cannot be ruled out.

Whatever be the case, the Bhringīsha Saṁhitā is an important source of information about the ritual traditions of Kashmir in as much as it points to the emergence of the worship of the Mother Goddess as the dominating religious cult in Kashmir, alongside the worship of Shiva. In fact, while celebrating the sacredness of the various shrines, lakes, rivers and other places of Hindu pilgrimage in Kashmir, it gives the mantras, legends, hymns and *dhyāna-ślokas* of the popular Kashmiri goddesses, describing in particular the glorification of the shrines of Kshīr Bhavānī, Jyeshṭhā, Shārikā, Jwālā, Shāradā as manifestations of the Divine Feminine. Composed in the form of a dialogue between Bhairava and Bhairavī, it indicates the popularity of the Shakti cult in Kashmir. Beginning with '*Shri Rajñyī Prādurbhāvaḥ*' or the 'Appearance of Rajñyī', the Bhringīsha Saṁhitā gives only the legend of the goddess, describing how she was brought from Lanka by Hanumana during the Rama-Ravana war and installed at Tulmul in Kashmir.[30] The goddess originally called Shyāmā is to be worshipped with milk, sugar candy, flowers and other vegetarian forms of offerings only, according to the Saṁhitā, (from which she has derived her present name Kshīr Bhavanī).[31] The Saṁhitā says nothing about the spring in which the shrine of the goddess stands and her image is installed, and though it calls her a manifestation of Tripura Sundari, it does not say anything about the ritualistic aspect of the Mother Goddess cult with which she is identified.

We find the Shārikā Parvata (modern Hārī Parbat) or Pradyumna Pīṭha, the shrine sacred to Goddess Shārikā, described in much greater detail in Bhringīsh Samhitā,

its glorification (*mahātmya*) covering six *pāṭalas* or sections.[32] While the 1st *pāṭala* gives the legend associated with the Goddess Shārikā, describing how the great Mother Goddess, a manifestation of Durgā, took the form of *śārikā* or a starling which carried a peak of Mount Sumeru in its beak and dropped it on a demon named Baka to destroy him, the second *pāṭala* tells us about the various deities occupying different places along the entire periphery of the Hārî Parbat hill and the directions in which they are to be worshiped as manifestations of the Mother Goddess. These include Shītalā, Sushīlakā, Kāmā, Charvāngī Ṭankadhāriṇī, Tārā, Pārvatī, Shārikā, Bhuvaneshī, Tvaritā, Trilokeshī, Mahātripurasundarī, Tripurā Bālā, Ugra Tārā, Tārā, Dakishiṇakālikā, Mātangī, Vināyakī, Mahāpadmāvatī, Chāmundā, Bhairavī, Trikūṭā, Vatpalī, Meghamālā, Mahejyā, Jwālāmukhī, Taruṇā, Mahākālī, Nilasaraswatī etc. Describing Kashmir as a *Siddhapīṭha,* the Saṁhitā in the third *pāṭala* gives details of the wishes that these deities fulfill when worshipped and prescribes Tuesday and Saturday especially as the days of worship of the Goddess with offerings of milk, clarified butter, candied sugar, fruit, bulbs etc.[33] The main rock representing Shārikā is to be bathed with milk with great devotion. It is to be smeared with saffron, sandalwood paste and vermilion and worshipped with aloe-wood sticks and other incenses and perfumes. Offerings of fish, meat, cakes of flour, betel leaves and different kinds of flowers are also to be made to appease the Goddess. The fourth *pāṭala* describes the number of rocks sacred to different goddesses, while the fifth describes various ways to circumambulate individual deities as well as the entire path around the sacred hill. The sixth and the last *pāṭala* describes the rituals associated with the worship of the *Shrīchakra* as the symbol of the Mother Goddess both in its natural and iconic forms; giving the different *bīja-mantras* or seed formulas to be uttered in respect of various manifestations of the Goddess and the merits that accrue from their worship through the *yantra.*

Another goddess whose *prādurbhāva* (appearance) is described at length in the Bhringīsha Saṁhitā is Jyeshṭhā, said to be elder sister of Lakshmī, whose sacred shrine is located in Zeeṭhyār in the outskirts of Srinager city.[34] The legends given in the Saṁhitā relate her appearance with the Puranic story of *samudramanthana* or churning of the ocean and also link her with the heroic exploits of Vetāla Bhairava, a local deity. The worship rites of the goddess and the Vetāla and the offerings to be made to them are also described as also the merits one obtains through such worship. Just

listening to the story of the appearance of the goddess, says the Saṁhitā, equals the merits of performing a Vajpeya sacrifice.[35]

As we have said earlier, the Bhringīsha Saṁhitā is concerned mainly with the glorification of *tīrthas* or sacred sites located in Kashmir. The rituals and ceremonies associated with them represent a period in the religious history of Kashmir when sacred shrines and places of pilgrimage had become centres of group religious activities for the Hindus. The Puranic and Tantric liturgy that came to dominate their ritualistic behaviour continues to constitute the core of their religious life even now. Among the numerous places of pilgrimage described in the Bhringīsha Saṁhitā are the Kedāra and Vārāha Kshetra (region) in Baramula, the Kapālamochana Tīrtha at Shopian, Mārtanda, Pushkara, Harmukuṭagangā, Amarnāth and the sacred stops that fall en route, sacred sites in the Godara or Godāvarī region, a number of places situated on the bank of the river Vitasta or Jhelum down to the Wular lake which are considered sacred and which comprise the largest portion of the text. The work in fact celebrates numerous springs, rivers and their confluences, mountains, hills and other religious spots in Kashmir as places of pilgrimage and mentions their spiritual significance. It also describes the significance of festivals like Shivarātri and Navavarshotsva or Navreh which are popular among Kashmiri Hindus.

An interesting feature of the work is that quite a number of the pilgrimage places in Kashmir are named after well-known Hindu pilgrimage centres of India, like Ganga, Godavari, Prayag, Kurukshetra, Pushkar etc.; What is significant from the ritualistic point of view, however, is that although '*homa*' is mentioned as a ritual act to be performed at these places, emphasis is on practices like *yātrā* or pilgrimage, *snāna* or ritual bath, *japa,* utterance of *mantras* and chanting of hymns, observance of fasts, making offerings of vegetarian or non-vegetarian articles of cooked or uncooked food, *dāna* or donation of ritual objects or cash money, *śrāddha,* bathing the image with water, milk or ghee and smearing it with vermilion, ghee, saffron or sandalwood paste, offering it incense, fragrance, *argha* or grains of rice, flowers etc., and observance of other Pūjā rites. Even '*svādhyāya*' or study (reading religious texts) has been regarded as a form of worship:

arcanaṁ vandanaṁ vāpi śrāddhaṁ homāpi vā japaṁ /
svādhyāyaṁ athvā yah kuryādathā niścitaṁ //

(B.S. p. 67, v. 76)

These practices, according, to the Saṁhitā, lead to acquiring of great merit (*ananta phalaṁ*) – thousand times more than that of an *aśvamedha* or *vājapeya* sacrifice. And yet the mantras prescribed to be uttered are to be both Vedic and Tantric – "*mantra vedika tāntrika*", (B.S. p. 141, v. 21), as are the practices to be performed – "*vedatantrānusāraḥ*" (B.S. p. 140, v, 14). Interestingly again, it is stated that these ceremonial acts release one from the most heinous of sins (*mahāpātaka*), and that these can be performed by anyone, even the *mlechhas* (Muslims). Thus, about Markāshrama it is claimed:

Brāhmanaḥ kśatriyaḥ vāpi śudrovā mlechha eva ca /
Markāśrame puṇyakrīḍyaḥ sa yāti paramaṁ gatiṁ //

Śrāddhas or post-funerary rites are among the rituals commonly prescribed at pilgrimage places situated on the banks of rivers, lakes or springs along with ritual bath and drinking of water. At times strange gifts are recommended to be given away on such occasions. For instance, after bathing in Kedārakuṇḍa, one is asked to perform a *śrāddha* and give away an image of a buffalo-bull considered to be the vehicle of Yama, the god of Death, as a gift with its mouth of gold, ears of copper, back and belly of bronze, eyes of emerald and tail of pearls.[36] The image is to be installed on spot and given away along with a pitcher full of sesame seeds after consecrating it properly.

Apart from glorification of places of pilgrimage, significance of two most important festivals of Kashmiri Hindus, Shivarātri and Navreh or New Year celebration is described in detail in the Bhringīsha Saṁhitā.[37] Giving the background of Shivarātri as celebrated by Kashmiri Hindus one day earlier i.e. on the 13th of the dark fortnight of Phalguna (February-March) instead of the 14th day of Phālguna when it is celebrated by Hindus in general, the Saṁhitā makes it clear that the former is a *Bhairavotsava* or a festival dedicated to Bhairava. It was on this day at *pradośakāla* (evening twilight), it says, that Shiva appeared to Brahma and Vishnu as a *jwālātinga* or '*linga* of flame', and both sang hymns in praise of his greatness. Though the Saṁhitā indicates that the deity is to be worshipped according to Tantric mode on this occasion, it says nothing about the elaborate rituals involved in Shivarātri worship in Kashmir except that these are to be performed in accordance with the *Dakśinācāra, Vāmācāra* and *Mahācāra* traditions.

This is not the case with the *Navavarshotsava* or *Navreh* celebrations, about which fortunately some broad guidelines are given. A bronze pot in which rice, fragrant flowers, golden image of a god, fruit, curds, and other auspicious things are kept, is to be seen on this occasion before sunrise and sweet words are to be spoken. Visits are to be made to the houses of one's relatives and friends and fruits are to be given as presents to them. Sweets are to be exchanged and enjoyed with them. Brahma, Shiva, Lakshmi, and Ṣaraswati, Ganesha and Surya are to be worshipped. Forecasts for the year from the new almanac are to be read in the company of others, and the day is to be spent amidst musical and dance performances. Celebrating the day in this manner and listening to or reading about its significance liberates one from sins, fulfils wishes and brings rewards equal in merit to the performance of a thousand *aśvamedhas* or a hundred *vajpāya* sacrifices.[38]

With the exodus of almost all Hindus from Kashmir, most of the *yātrās* have become a thing of the past, except the Amarnāth pilgrimage and visits to Kshīr Bhavanī and one or two more shrines during their annual festivals. Many of the pilgrimage centres have been vandalized, desecrated and even taken over by the locals, like the Bhadrakālī shrine which is mentioned in the Nilamata. Many of them have been deserted or are being guarded by the security forces. This has greatly affected the religious life of the Kashmiri Hindus, who have been scattered to Jammu, Delhi and other parts of the country, living only on the memory of their popular shrines and holy places and the worship rituals associated with them.

The Jayākhyā Saṁhitā and Other Sources

As we have seen in the case of the *Devotthāna* festival described in the Nilamata Purana, Tantric Vaishnavism, or the worship of Vishnu according to the norms prescribed by the Pañcarātra texts was an important feature of Kashmiri religious life. Though the Pañcarātra cult now survives only in South India, some of the earliest Southern teachers of the school like Yamunācharya link the origins of Pañcarātra with the Kashmiri Āgamas and Ekāyaṇa. It is obvious from the reference to it in the Nilamata, a 6th century text, that the Pañcarātra was known in Kashmir from very early times.[39] Utpalacharya, the celebrated Kashmiri Shaiva philosopher, quotes in his *Spandakārika* from a number of Pañcarātra Saṁhitās belonging to the Ekāyaṇa School that flourished in Kashmir. The revealed character of the Ekāyaṇa, which has

the White Yajurveda as its original source, finds its earliest mention in the Chhandogya Upanishad. The Jayākhyā Saṁhitā is regarded as one of the three jewels of the Pañcarātra literature, the other two being the Sāttvata and Paushkara, and all the three have been reverentially mentioned by Utpala in the 10th century, with a 'Shri' prefixed to their name. The Jayākhyā Saṁhitā, therefore, is a work of high antiquity belonging at least to the 5th century A.D., as B. Bhattacharya, General Editor of the text of the Saṁhitā published under the Gaekward Sanskrit Series, Baroda, has pointed out.[40] Another Kashmiri Shaiva teacher Bhagvatopala, who lived perhaps in the 11th century, has quoted straightaway from the Vaishnava Āgamic work '*Samvitprakāśa*' said to have been written by a Kashmiri Brahmin Vamandatta belonging to Ekāyaṇa. This, as Mark S.G. Dyczkowski observers, "shows the close affinity between certain forms of Vaishnavism in Kashmir with monistic Shaivism."[41]

Kashmir was thus an important centre of Pañcarātra Vaishnavism which centres around the *chaturvyūha* theory wherein the God Vasudeva assumes the different forms of Sankarshaṇa, Pradyumna and Aniruddha. It appears that the Hārī Parvat hill, also called Pradyumna Pīṭha, must have been one of the prominent seats of the cult in Kashmir, though it has been associated with the worship of the Mother Goddess in the Bhringīsha Saṁhitā. Pañcarātra texts like the Jayākhyā, therefore, could be a valuable source of information about the Vaishnava Tantric rituals that have found an important place in Kashmiri Hindu religious practices, especially the Pūjā rites. Ritually speaking, the Jayākhyā covers a vast range from *matṛkācakra* and various modes of *mātṛkā* (mother-goddess) worship to mantras, *mudrās, manḍalas, yāgas, japas*, ritual baths, initiation rituals, fire-oblations and *homas*, many of them having a bearing on the practices prevalent in Kashmir. Along with a number of Pañcarātra rituals and ceremonies, several ritual drawings and diagrams given in the Jayākhyā have been incorporated in the Kashmiri ritualistic system still in vogue.

The Tantrāloka and Āgamic Rituals

Āgamic or Trika Shaivism and Shaktism based on the Tantras, with their elaborate system of rituals, were extremely popular in early medieval Kashmir and continued to be a dominating feature of the religious activities of the Kashmiri Hindus even after the advent of Islam. Many of these rituals form an integral part of their religious life down to this day. In fact, Kashmir itself contributed substantially to

the development of a wide range of Tantric cults which defied the traditional religious rites and evolved their own esoteric practices. Later, in the middle of the 9th century, three important schools having their roots in the Tantric traditions of the Shaivāgamas, namely Kula, Krama and Trika, synthesized and integrated themselves into a new non-dualist and idealist school of Shaiva system known as Kashmir Shaivism. Divided into three main classes Āgama, Spanda and Pratyabhijñā, Kashmir Shaivism turned mainly to the *Bhairavatantras* together with their secret doctrines and practices, including ritual consumption of meat and wine as well as ritual intercourse, for its basic features. Kashmir Shaivite praxis, however interiorized these *vāma mārga* (left path) Tantric rituals elevating them to a level beyond outer ritual and interpreting them in terms of their non-dualist philosophy.

It was Abhinavagupta who, even as he established the superiority of the Trika over other schools of Āgamic Shaivism, also known as Tantric Shaivism, brought together the essential elements of all Shaiva rituals and doctrines in his magnum opus, the Tantrāloka, under one unique exegetical plan. While drawing mainly on the *Bhairavatantras* like the Mālinī Vijaya Tantra, Siddhayogeśwarī Tantra, Svacchanda Tantra, Rudrayāmala Tantra, Mṛgendra, Tantra, Triśirobhairava, Devayāmala, Netra Tantra, Ānanda Bhairava, Vijñana Bhairava, Uchuṣma Bhairava and Mātanga and Yoginī Tantra for his interpretations in the Tantrāloka, Abhinava presented the Āgamic ritual in a way that it came to be understood as an inner process of realization. A vast compendium of the theological and liturgical aspects of Tantric Shaivism, the Tantrāloka is regarded as the single most important and most authoritative source of information on the Tantric rites and practices which were widely popular in the Kashmir of Abhinava's times. These include *mantra, mudrā, nyāsa, maṇḍala, dīkṣā, caryā, upāsanā* and *yāga,* as we have already stated in the previous chapter. *Nityakarma* or daily rites and *naimittika karma,* or occasional rites, as well as *antyeśṭī* or funerary and *śrāddha* or post-funerary rites have also been explained in the work, albeit within the Kashmir Shaiva framework.

Tantrāloka gives its own interpretation of *maṇḍalas* or mystic circles, *mudrās* or hand poses and *yantras* or sacred diagrams, which occupy an important place in the Tantric system of worship practiced in Kashmir. Abhinavagupta has devoted one full chapter in the work, the 31st *Āhnīka,* to the description of *maṇḍalas,* interpreting the term variously as: (1) *devatācakram* or a mystic circle in which a deity is installed

(2) the group of nerves for the passage of *prāṇic* currents, and (3) the diagram of the trident with lotuses. The last mentioned, namely the trident with lotuses (*triśulābjādimanḍalaṁ*) shows a triangle depicting the divine Shakti in all her aspects.[42]

In the 'Parātriśikā Vivaraṇa' of Abhinavagupta also, which is based on the Mālinīvijaya Tantra, we can locate several ritualistic elements of Kashmir Shaivism. In this important Shaiva text, the divine consciousness is identified with the Supreme Word (*parā vāk*) and every letter or word regarded as derived from and ultimately inseparable form this consciousness.[43] With the Word being at the centre of the Kashmir Shavites' whole philosophy of language, we find them analyzing the character of mantric utterance in terms of its gradual descent from an undifferentiated transcendental level to the differentiated gross level in *its parā, paśyantī, madhyamā* and *vaikharī* stages. The meaning of the component letters of a mantra in Kashmir Shaiva analysis is centered round two ways of arranging the Sanskrit alphabet – *Mātṛkā* and *Mālinī*. In *Matṛkā* these letters a re-arranged in the regular order with the vowels coming first and the consonants following them serially. In *Mālinī* they are arranged in an irregular manner with vowels and consonants mixed without any consideration of serial order. According to the '*Parātriśikā Vivaraṇa,* the mantra of *Mātṛkā* is '*akṣahrīm*' and that of *Mālinī* '*nāpharīṁ*'. Both these mantras are to be repeated twenty five times – five times each for the five deities Īshāna, Tantpurusha, Aghora,Vāmadeva and Sadyojāta – after *nyāsa* or mental assignment of different parts of the body to different deities. Meditation upon *Mātṛkā* and *Mālinī* brings about spiritual enlightenment, the Kashmir Shaivites believe.

Though a good number of the Tantric texts, including the Bhairava Shastras which were related to many a Tantric practice followed by Kashmiri adherents of Shaivāgamic or Shākta faiths, are lost, Tantras continue to be relevant sources of Kashmiri Hindu rituals. We shall deal with some of these practices in the chapters to follow.

As the core structure of Kashmiri Hindu ritual system is much the same as that of Hindu rituals in general, Vedic, Tantric or Puranic, there are a number of pan-Indian Hindu ritual texts that the Hindus of Kashmir use for individual or group religious activity, of course with slight regional variations or modifications. Some of these are Kritya Kalpataru, Mantra Brahmaṇa, Śloka Tarpaṇa, Lalitā Sahasranāma,

Durgā, Saptaśatī, Śārdā Tilaka, Maheśvara Kalpa, Vamkeśvara Tantra, Kulārṇava Tantra, Devī Rahasya, Śiva Purāṇa etc., besides those already mentioned. A comprehensive study of these varied texts, therefore, becomes essential to fully investigate and understand the doctrines and practices of Kashmiri Hindu religious rites and ceremonies. There are also a number of practices the Kashmiri Hindus follow which are of folk-religious character.

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CHAPTER 3

Life-cycle Rituals – Childhood Samskāras

Shrāna Sŏndar and *Kāhanethúr*

Initiation rituals or *saṁskāras* form the core of religion for most Kashmiri Hindus even though modernization and other socio-economic as well as political factors have greatly changed their way of life and their ritual behavior. Many of the *saṁskāras*, or life-cycle rituals as they are called because of being performed at different stages of life from birth to death, have been done away with while many have undergone substantial modifications. The exodus of Hindus from Kashmir and their dispersal to different parts of the country has further changed the situation, forcing them to perform only the most essential among them and that too in a much curtailed form. As things stand today, of the sixteen standard Hindu *saṁskāras* only *mekhal* or the sacred thread investiture ceremony, *nethúr* or marriage, *antyeṣṭi* or funerary and *śrāddha* or post-funerary rites are considered as essential by Kashmiri Hindus in the conditions in which they are forced to live now. The acute shortage of performing priests has made the performance of even these few ceremonies rather difficult. Before the exodus, however, a few more *saṁskāras* like *shrāna sŏndar* or *jātkarma, kāhanethúr* or *nāmakaraṇa* and *zarakāsai or cūḍākaraṇa* were generally performed with considerable enthusiasm. Today hardly a few people perform these rituals elaborately. The life-cycle *sasṁskāras* or the passage of time rites obviously begin with the birth of a new child or rather from

the time of its conception. The pre-natal *saṁskāras* like *garbhādāna, puṁsavana, sīmāntonnayana* etc. however, were hardly observed by the Hindus of Kashmir even earlier – at least not in so recent a past. But a ceremony known as '*dŏd dyun*' or 'curds ceremony' was performed till recently when a woman in the seventh or eighth month of her first or second pregnancy would go from her parental house to the house of her in-laws with large pots of curds flavoured with saffron, cardamoms and almonds for distribution among relatives and neighbours. A feast would also be given on this occasion which would be construed as public declaration her condition. Needless to say, this custom has now almost completely disappeared. As for *sīmāntonnayana*, a ceremony quite resembling it is performed during the sacred thread investiture for the male child and on the occasion of marriage. In this ceremony, called '*närivan khārun*', husbands decorate the locks of hair of their wives with strands of red cord with the help of twigs of the mulberry tree (instead of *Virtara* wood).

The *shrāna sŏndar* and *kāhnethúr* ceremonies are in fact a blend of the *jātakarma* and *nāmakaraṇa* ceremonies. *Jātakarma* is only mentioned by Laugākshi and no details about it are given. Prior to it a ceremony called '*sośyantī savanaṁ*' is described which was performed for smooth and safe delivery. The husband of the expectant mother would touch her, placing his hand on her hand and heart, chanting a hymn for the delivery to be speedy and easy. The hymn recited on this occasion runs as follows:

> "*Yathāyam vātaḥ pavate yathā samudra ejāti / evam te garbha ejātu saha jarayāyum avapādya temiti kṣipreva prajāyate //*"[1]
>
> ['Just as the wind moves swiftly and the sea is agitated, may the passage of the child from your womb be quick'].

This ceremony is no longer performed. Perhaps it was replaced by the 'curds ceremony', which we have already described. After the sixth day of delivery, mother and the new-born babe is given a ritual bath with hot water made fragrant with medicinal herbs. This ceremony is called *shrāna sŏndar*. Prior to this the navel cord is severed soon after the birth and the Gayatri mantra is whispered into the child's ear and it is given the breasts of the mother after a wash. On the *shrāna sŏndar* day, female relatives and neighbours assemble in the confinement room of the mother and after the bath pass lighted pieces of birch bark around the head of

the child and all those present. While doing so, they sing a song with the refrain *"shokh tú panasund"*. It is not clear as to what these words exactly mean. Some people interpret the word '*panasund*' as a distorted form of *punaḥsantu*, meaning "May you have more children", some say it is a distortion of '*puṁsvan*', but both these interpretations seem to be only guesses. It seems that the line *"shokh tú panasund"* is remnant of a forgotten hymn or mantra and has been distorted to an extent that it is difficult to make any sense of it now. Perhaps the mantra was written on pieces of birch bark which was used in Kashmir for writing before the introduction of paper. Probably the pieces of birch bark were tossed around the infant's head to ward off evil spirits as it was supposed be particularly vulnerable to their influence.

After the ritual bath, the newly become mother is to be regarded free from the impurity of birth and is allowed to come out of the confinement room and attend to household work as usual. She enters the confinement room a few days before delivery and special care is taken to ensure that nobody disturbs her. Only one female attendant is allowed to look after the needs of the expectant mother while others are not permitted to enter the room. An earthen vessel known as '*hury lĕjy*' or '*hury rāza*' is kept on the right side of her bed in the room and a little from everything she is given to eat is put into it till the day of the bath. An earthen lamp is kept burning in the middle of the confinement room. But on the day of *shrāna sŏndar*, the earthen vessel and its contents are thrown away and with all taboos gone the mother is taken out of the room for a round of the house or the neighbourhood.

All these ceremonial acts have now been discarded as redundant as most children are now born in the hospital or under the care of an experienced obstetrician. However, an interesting feature of the *shrāna sŏndar* ceremony has been discontinued which had to do more with ritual art than religion. A *vyūg* or a circular design would be made with lime and colour on the porch of the house and the new born child wrapped in a neat cloth would be placed on it. A stone mortar would also be placed on the *vyūg* on one side.

The *kāhanethúr* ceremony of the Kashmiri Hindus corresponds to the *nāmakaraṇa saṁskāra* as naming of the new born child is an essential part of it. It is a purification ceremony which is to be performed on the eleventh day after the

birth of the child and it essentially follows *shrāna sŏndar*. However, it is not just a naming ceremony and can be performed even after the prescribed day on any auspicious date selected according to astrology. The period of impurity caused by birth expires on the eleventh day, so the eleventh day was chosen for performing *kāhnethûr*. Today it is no longer considered an essential *saṁskāra* even if there are people who still perform it, though not on the traditionally prescribed eleventh day or in the traditional spirit. A *homa* is performed on the occasion for a long and prosperous life of the child. *Khir* is cooked as an offering to the gods and is distributed as *naivedya* among relatives, friends and neighbours who are treated to a sumptuous feast on the day. After the ceremony is over the child is ceremoniously carried out and shown the directions in which his relatives live.

As for naming, Laugakshi has very clearly ordained:

"Putra jāte nāma dhīyate"[3]
[A name should be given to the new-born son]

The name according to Laugākshi should be ideally composed of four syllables beginning with as sonant and with a semi-vowel in the middle: "*ghoṣavadādyaṁ tarntastha caturākṣaraṁ*". Oblations of clarified butter should be offered to Prajāpati at the homa from a bronze vessel with the hymns "*hiraṇyagarbhaḥ samvartatāgre*" and "*saṁvatsarasya pratimāṁ*". The four oblations are: "*kaya svāhā*", "*kasmai svāhā*", "*katasmai svāhā*", and "*prajāpataya svāhā*."[4] The child's father should perform the ceremony to increase the child's intelligence through these oblations and then hand over the child to its mother for being fed at her breasts after a wash – a ritual performed during *jātkarma* also – "*agnirāyursiti*" mantra and the "*madhu vāta ṛtāyate*" hymn. The "*madhu vāta*" hymn should be recited three times with the first two lines beginning with "*madhu ṛtāyate madhu kṣranti sindhavaḥ*", when the child is to be given the right breast while "*madhu naktuṁ*" is for the left breast and "*madhumanno*" for both the breasts together.

After dipping a gold ornament, preferably a gold ring, in the clarified butter kept in a bronze vessel, the child is fed the clarified butter attached to it. The child is then made to wear the gold ring around its neck. The father of the child is then to touch the forehead of the child with his hand while chanting the mantra. "*aśvino prāṇa*" . He shold smell the child's head and tell it that it is the limb of his own limbs and a part of his own self. He should also wish the child a long life reciting

the benedictory Vedic verse "*jīvema śardaḥ śatam, paśya śaradaḥ śatam*" ("May you live a hundred autumns, may you see a hundred autumns").

The Laugākshi Grihyasūtra prescribes that only two names should be given to a Brahmana: "*dve hi nāma Brāhmaṇasya kartavye*."[4] The first name should be *vyāvahārika* or popular name meant for general use in the society. This name is very important from the practical point of view, and is therefore required to be framed thoughtfully in a way that is auspicious and significant. The second name is the patronymic or the surname. Traditionally, the initial letter of the Sanskrit alphabet is presided over by one constellation or the other. So a child born under a certain constellation is to be named after one of the letters governed by that constellation.

The *kāhnethúr* ceremonies end with a feast given to the presiding priest and other guests. The function has become more social than religious in nature and is hardly performed on the prescribed date. The procedure for its performance is not weighed in favour of the male child, the female child's *kāhnethúr* also being celebrated in the same manner and with the same rituals. Not many years ago it was believed that unless the *kāhnethúr* ceremony of a child is performed, the six-monthly *śrāddha* cannot be performed, nor can any son or daughter in the family be married or the sacred thread investiture ceremony of a male child performed.

This is no longer the case now. Circumstances have changed the entire ritual behaviour of the Hindu community of Kashmir which has been uprooted from its native soil. The ceremony is no longer regarded as essential. Even those who may choose to perform it no longer follow the entire procedure laid down for it by Laugākshi or the customs that later came to be associated with it. Name giving, which according to Laugākshi and other *gṛhyasūtra*s should be performed on the tenth, twelfth, hundredth day or the expiry of the year[5] has now no definite time limit and can be postponed to the second or third or even fifth year after the child's birth, subject to the convenience of the family.

During the period of impurity before *nāmakaraṇa*, Laugākshi prescribes a *homa* to protect the mother and child from any harm by evil spirits, goblins and demons. The *homa* is to be performed morning and evening, throwing mustard seeds mixed with chaff of small grains into fire continuously for the ten days of impurity. This wards off Pishachas like Ṣaṇḍa, Marka, Upavīta, Taunḍuleya, Ulūhala and

Capala from her confinement room.[6] These oblations also destroy demons named Haryakṣna, Kumbhî, Cupanîmukha and Capala and also the ogresses (*rākshasīs*) Keśinī, Śavalominī Kaca, Kauñca, and Apakāshinī who can harm the mother and new born babe. It can not be said with any certainty whether this *homa* was performed in Kashmir or not, but other Sūtra writers too have referred to this ceremony under the name *sośyantī – karma* to ward off "the terrible blood sucking demons" named above who, it was feared, would kill the new born. *Sośyanti karma* took place before the ceremony of *jātakarma* proper, as pointed out by Dr. Rajbali Pandey in this book 'Hindu Saṁskāras'.[7] As of today, these rites are not performed by Kashmiri Hindus, but a ceremony called *shishur* was till recently performed with the same purpose to protect a new mother and her child from possible harm by evil spirits and goblins, especially during the winter months as its very name suggests. It was believed that these spirits frequent a place more during winter months and have to be kept away. To ensure the protection of mother and child from them, a tiny pouch of brocade was stitched on to the headgear of the woman and her babe. The pouch was filled with lime and turmeric powder believed to be effective against them and sanctified by a mantra. A feast was also given on this occasion to relatives, friends and neighbours making it a festive social function. The origin of this rite is not known and it is hardly performed by anyone now. Probably it was part of some ancient magic rite whose details have been forgotten.

The Laugākshi Gṛhyasūtras lay down that in the third month or rather two and a half months after its birth a child should be carried out and shown the sun and the moon for the first time. Both the ceremonies have also been clubbed together as *niṣkramaṇa* or 'the child's day out' and it was performed amidst recitation of mantras and oblations into fire. A circular portion of the courtyard was plastered on this occasion with cow dung and clay and the *homa* fire was lit. Amidst recitation of appropriate mantras and hymns the child's father or elder members of the family would make the child face towards the sun or the moon, two separate ceremonies being observed for showing the two celestial bodies to it. The ceremonies would end with feasting the Brahmanas with rice mixed with clarified butter and wishing the child a long, healthy and prosperous life. It is not known when these ceremonies were performed in Kashmir and when they ceased to be performed, but the ceremony of taking a child out on the eleventh day after its birth coinciding with

kāhnethúr is probably a remnant of the *āditya darśana and candra darśana* ceremonies mentioned in Laugākshi's Sūtras.[8] We have already referred to this ceremony, though in passing. According to Dr. Rajbali Pandey, the significance of the *niṣkramaṇa* ceremony "lay in the physical necessity of the child and impressing on it the sublime grandeur of the universe".[9]

Māsa Nethúr or Monthly Birthday

When the child is one month old, his *māsa nethúr* or monthly birthday is celebrated. This continues until it is one year old when its 'yearly birthday' is celebrated. On the occasion of the *māsa nethúr,* the child is made to wear new clothes, and *tāhrī* or rice boiled with turmeric and ghee and salt added for flavour is cooked as offering to the gods and then distributed as *naivedya*. The ceremony, which is no longer performed now, has the sanction of Laugākshi: '*evam māsi māsi sthālīpākasyeśtva jātakarmaṇa vājyaysa*."[10] The first yearly birthday of the child is of course celebrated with great enthusiasm. Laugākshi forbids the parents of the child to eat meat on that day – "*māṁsam tu nāśnītaḥ.*"[11]

Anna Prāvish or *Annaprāśana*

Annaprāśana or ceremoniously feeding the child with solid food for the first time is the next important *saṁskāra* among the lifecycle rituals. Generally the *gṛhyasūtras* prescribe that it should be performed in the sixth month after the birth of the child. Laugākshi too concurs with this determination of the time, but at the same time gives an option of performing the ceremony after the appearance of teeth: "*Ṣaṣṭhe annaprāśnam jāteṣu danteṣu vā.*"[12] According to Dr. Rajbali Pandey, "Teeth were visible signs that the child was able to take solid food"[13] The 'Hiraṇyakeśī Brahma–Karma Samuccaya' suggests the eighth month from the birth alternatively.[14] Thus, the feeding ceremony is connected with the child's physical needs and state of health. The idea is to wean away the child from the mother's milk when it is strong enough to digest solid food. In Kashmir the ceremony is called *annaprāvish* and is not performed strictly according to the prescribed schedule. In fact, in modern times it has lost its religious significance, though Laugākshi prescribes that oblations of various grains mixed together should be given on the occasion to an image made of clarified butter of Ayurdadeva or the god

who gives longevity. A hymn to Soma, the King of Auṣadhis (medicinal herbs) is also to be recited praying that the child may live free of diseases and troubles and full of joy and happiness.

Laugākshi does not give any more details about the *saṁskāra*, saying nothing about who should feed the child and what kind of food should be given to it. The tradition, however, was that different types of food should be given to the child to eat, including meat. Generally, a little mincemeat was given to it on this occasion along with a little *khīr* in the belief that this would give it nourishment as well as mental strength. Animal food, it must be said, was seldom forbidden on such occasions in Kashmir. The child, of course, is made to wear new clothes brought generally by its mother's parents on this occasion.

As for the person who should feed the child on the ceremony, it is generally an elderly person in the family, a grandfather or grandmother or any other elderly relative no matter whether male or female. The child is seated on the lap of the person or on a seat and fed with tender affection, without any accompanying mantras. The maternal relatives of the child, maternal grandfather or grandmother or mostly uncle, bring a plate (usually of bronze), a cup, a tumbler and spoon (all of silver). An interesting feature of the ceremony is that a plateful of *khīr* is placed before the child on one side and a writing board and an inkpot on the other. If the child handles the writing board first, then it is believed that he/she shall become a learned person. But if he/she goes towards the plate of *khīr* first, then it is believed that he/she shall become an ordinary though prosperous person.

Zarakāsay or the First Tonsure

The *cūḍakaraṇa saṁskāra* or the first tonsure of the male child is called *zarakāsay* in Kashmiri, literally meaning cropping of the hair. It is also called *cūḍakaraṇa* and is usually performed when the child (son) is around three years old. This is the age prescribed by Laugākshi (and other *Gṛhyasūtras*) which describes the rite in detail. "*tritīye varṣasya bhūyiṣṭhe gate cūḍā karyate.*"[15] The commentator Devapala explains the word "*bhūyiṣṭhe*" as "at the end of the eighth and the beginning of the ninth month" of the third year. The authorities, however, give the option of performing it in the fifth or even the seventh year."[16] Dr. Rajbali Pandey quotes Āshvalāyana as saying, "Cuḍākaraṇa is praiseworthy in the third

or the fifth year; but it can be performed in the seventh year or with the Upanayana".[17] Kashmiri Hindus generally prefer the last option but there are some who like it to be performed in the third or the fifth year itself.

Zarakāsai or cūḍakaraṇa is performed on a day considered astrologically auspicious as ordained by Laugākshi, but Kashmiri Hindus do not perform any *homa* before the actual ceremony of shaving the head takes place. Nor is the ceremony of the first tonsure accompanied by any mantras that we find mentioned in the Gṛhyasūtra. Surely, there must have been a time when the procedure given by Laugākshi was followed as precisely as possible, but it must have been later given up as after the advent of Islam there was hardly any barber left among the Hindus, all persons belonging to the profession having got converted. The Brahmins who alone resisted conversion thought it below their dignity to adopt the occupation, and if any one did so, no one was prepared to give a girl in marriage to him or anyone in his family. The Muslim barber did not, however, mind performing the ceremonial tonsure of the children of their Hindu clients. So the ceremony continued, but became more ceremonial without having much to do with religious ritual as such.

Writing about the origin of *cūḍākaraṇa*, Rajbali Pandey says:

> "Necessity and fear both mingled together and gave rise to the Chūdākarṇa ceremonies. The practical and beneficent aspects found their expression in the accompanying verses. The sharp razor coming into contact with the child naturally inspired terror in the father of the child, who requested the sharp and hard iron razor to be mild and harmless to it. These sentiments were responsible for giving the Cūḍākaraṇa a religious shape.[18]

It became a religious ceremony, Dr. Pandey further states, in the Vedic period itself, the verses relating to it being found in Vedic literature. Almost all these verses, he says, are used in the Gṛhyasūtras, showing that these were composed for the purpose of tonsure only. For instance, in the Atharaveda, "the shaving razor is praised and requested to be harmless", he writes.[19] The ceremony consisted of "wetting the head, prayer to the razor, invitation to the barber, cutting the hair with Vedic verses and wishes for long life, prosperity, valour and even progeny for the child". However it was in the period of the Gṛhyasūtras, that the ceremony was given a systematic form and the ritual procedure for it was prescribed in detail. Later on addition of

social customs and other factors further changed its complexion. In the Kashmiri Hindu community too, the *saṁskāra* assumed the shape of an important religious and social event but, as already stated, it became more ceremonial than real. Slowly, the religious aspect lost much of its significance.

The main purpose of *cūḍakāraṇa*, as stated in religious texts, was to achieve health and beauty for the child. One of its most important features was the arrangement of the top hair called *cūḍā* or *śikhā* in Sanskrit. It should be arranged in accordance with the family tradition, says Laugākshi in his Gṛhyasūtras: "*yathā kuladharma vā*."[20] The tufts of hair to be arranged could be one, three or even five, as the family fashion might be. Laugākshi gives interesting examples of these fashions.[21] The descendants of Vasishṭha, he says, keep one tuft on the right side of the head ("*dakṣṇintaḥ kapūja Vāsiṣṭhānām*"). The descendents of Atri and Kashyapa keep two tufts on either side of the head ("*ubhayato Atri Kāśyapānām*"). There are some who keep one line of hair and others who keep one tuft ("*vājīmeke*"). Keeping only one tuft later became the standard practice among Hindus of Northern India, including Kashmiri Hindus. Keeping of the tuft or hair on top of the head slowly became one of the two essential outward signs of Hindu identity, the other being wearing the sacred thread. In the Kashmiri language the top hair is called '*tshog*', and till recently it was considered essential to keep it. At present Hindus of Kashmir no longer keep a '*tshog*', except a very few, and those too persons of an elderly age belonging to the rural areas of Kashmir. The purpose of keeping the hair, according to Laugākshi, is welfare of the person concerned. If one does not keep the top hair, explains his commentator Devapala, disaster is bound to be the outcome.[22]

The procedure that Kashmiri Hindus follow at present while performing the *zarkāsay* or *cūḍakāraṇa* ceremony of a child – that is, those who still follow the tradition – is as follows. The child is given a ritual bath on a wooden seat as in the Divagon ceremony and is made to wear new clothes. These clothes, according to the custom, are brought by the family of the child's maternal grandmother and grandfather and include a new towel. Fried chopped liver of lamb and *khīr* are prepared on this occasion as sacrificial food and distributed among relatives and friends who are also treated to a sumptuous dinner. The barber is sent for and asked to be present at the auspicious movement fixed astrologically by the family priest.

After the worship of Ganesha, he is asked to shave off the hair on the child's head, taking care to keep the *tshog* (tuft). The cropped locks of hair are collected on a piece of new cloth, which is given as a gift to the barber after he has performed his act. The barber is also given cash money, a few walnuts, some kilograms of rice and a kilogram or so of common salt for this. Some decades back mustard oil was also among the gifts that he received from the *yajamāna*. The cropped hair is gathered in a deep earthen plate filled with water and walnuts (and not in a lump of cow dung as is the general custom among Hindus). Later a close relative of the child takes the gathered hair and the walnuts and buries them beneath a tree. This is done out of the fear that it could be used by enemies for performing magic or casting a spell on the child.

Home has been the theatre for most of the Kashmiri Hindu rituals. But there are people now who prefer to go a temple or a sacred shrine for their performance. This is true of *zarakāsay* or *cūḍakāraṇa* also. A *homa* is sometimes performed at the shrine while performing the ceremony and *tāhrī* etc. cooked as sacrificial food. However, with the displacement of Kashmiri Hindus from Kashmir much of it has changed now and only the minimal part of the rite is performed. According to the description given by Laugākshi, the ceremony started with *homa* oblations to the gods Aditya, Rudra, Vasu and Soma; then mixing warm water with cold water, the child's hair was moistened with mantras and prayers for his long life. Then, holding blades of *darbha* grass and the razor in hand, the chopping of the hair was started, accompanied by Vedic mantras. After applying a medicinal herb on the right side of the head, the barber would begin to shave it off with the razor and the *darbha* grass blades. Starting from the right side, he shaved the western part of the head, then the northern part and lastly the front part, each time reciting mantras and muttering benedictions: "O medicinal herbs protect the boy. O razor move smoothly and do not cause any injury to the boy"[23] and so on. The procedure must have been followed at one time or other, but probably things changed with the advent of Islam and then the modern age brought in its own modifications. As of today, many other prescriptions of Laugākshi have been done away with and, as already stated, the *zarakāsay* is now preferred at the time of *upanayana*.

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CHAPTER 4

Mekhal or Sacred Thread Investiture

Mekhal or the sacred thread investiture ceremony is regarded as one of the most important *saṁskāras* by the Kashmiri Hindus – the most essential *samskāra* preceding marriage for a boy. Also known as *upanayana* or *yajñopavīta,* it is a rite that has come down from very early times – perhaps the pre-Vedic age when the Indo-Iranian people lived together, as the Iranian (Parsi) ceremony of *Navjot* suggests. Without it one is not entitled to read the Vedas, perform a religious rite or marry an Aryan girl. But by virtue of its performance a boy is regarded to have been initiated and having acquired the status of a '*dvija*' or twice-born.

The preference of the Kashmiri Hindus for the word '*mekhal*' for the *upanayana* ceremony cannot be without some significance. Upanayana was originally an educational *saṁskāra* and its purpose was to take the initiate to the teacher so that he could be educated in the religious lore and different branches of learning. The *saṁskāra* was performed when the teacher accepted to take charge of the student and impart necessary education to him. Later, however, it lost its pure educational sense and was invested with mystical significance linking it with "the idea of the second birth through the Gayatri mantra". Slowly it assumed a ceremonious character with the investiture of the sacred thread, which took place at the end of the *yajña* performed to mark the initiation, becoming the main ritual. *Mekhalā* or wearing of the *muñja* girdle mainly to support the *kaupīna* or the loin

cloth was only a part of the ceremonies connected with Upanayana. How the Kashmiri Hindus came to identify it with the whole *saṁskāra* is not clear, but it seems that at some point of time it must have been for them the most important part as it stressed the vows of celibacy and purity of conduct as essential for the initiate going to the Acharya with the intention to learn. Whatever the case may be, the word became a synonym of *yajñopavīta* or the sacred thread investiture ceremony in course of time.

Quite interestingly, the description of *yajñopavīta* ceremony does not occur in the Gṛhyasūtras of Laugākshi, or in the other Gṛhyasūtras, except those of Pāraskara, as pointed out by Dr. Rajbali Pandey. It is in the Pāraskara Gṛhyasūtras that we find the famous mantra *"yajñopavītaṁ paramaṁ pavitraṁ"* used for the first time: *"yajñopavītaṁ paramaṁ pavitraṁ prajāpateryat sahjaṁ purastāt / āyuṣyamagraṁ pratimuñca śubhram yajñopavītaṁ balamastu tejaṁ."*[1]

The mantra, repeated by the initiate at the time of being invested with the sacred thread, asks for strength, long life and illumination for the boy.

Dr. Rajbali Pandey is of the view that *upanayana* became a compulsory ceremony "somewhere towards the close of the Upanishadic period".[2] According to him, it was made compulsory in order to make education universal. The *saṁskāra* also came to be regarded as possessing sanctifying power necessary to consecrate the person of those who were initiated and wore the sacred thread, giving them the status of the twice-born in the society. Thus, it became both a rite through which a child was taken to the teacher and which initiated him with the Gāyatrī mantra for the reading of the Vedas. Still later, it became a ceremony which had its main purpose the investiture of a boy with the sacred thread, though the educational sense may not have disappeared altogether.

In Kashmir, the *saṁskāra,* whether called *mekhal* or *yajñopavīta,* has become a combination of several *saṁskāras* from *vidyāraṁbha* or learning of alphabets to *samāvartana* or end of studentship, with wearing of the sacred thread as the most important rite. Even *saṁskāras* like *kāhanethúr.* (*nāmakaraṇa*) and *zarakāsay* (*cūḍākaraṇa* or the first tonsure) if not performed at the prescribed time can be combined with it. This has made *mekhal* or *yajñopavīta* a prolonged affair lasting for hours together, though the ceremony proper should not take so much time. However, it is the wearing of the sacred thread to which the greater significance

and sanctity is attached. That may be so because it has become for the Kashmiri Brahmins, as for Hindus elsewhere in the country, an essential symbol of their Hindu identity. Its three cords, which are tied together by a knot known as the *brahmagranthi,* are also fully symbolical and are said to represent the *ṛṣi ṛṇa, pitṛ ṛṇa* and *deva ṛṇa* or the debts one has to pay to the ancient seers, the ancestors and the gods. They are also said to symbolize the *guṇas sattva, raja* and *tamas* or purity or goodness, passion or activity and darkness or ignorance, the three qualities of *Prakriti* or Nature. As a symbol of the Gāyatrī mantra, the *yajñopavīta* is also supposed to lead to the attainment of spiritual merit.

In its present form, the *mekhal* or *upanayana* ceremony has become "a ceremonial farce which is performed sometime before the marriage of a twice born", to use the words of Dr. Rajbali Pandey.[3] It is a simultaneous enactment of almost all the important life-cycle rituals ordained for a boy by the religious authorities in the scriptures, many of them having become totally redundant. Let us have a look at the different elements that constitute the *saṁskāra* as of today and note the procedures involved at various stages of its performance.

Age

According to the Gṛhyasūtras of Laugākshi, whose ordainments alone the Kashmiri Hindus follow for their *achāra* or ritualistic behaviour, the *upanayana* ceremony of a Brahmana boy should be performed in the seventh year from birth or in the eight year from conception, that of a Kshatriya in the ninth year and that of a Vaishya in the eleventh year: "*Saptame varṣe Brahmaṇasyopanyanaṁ navame Rājānyasya ekādaśe Vaiśyasya.*"[4] This differentiation between the ages of the initiates, however, has no relevance for Kashmiri Hindus today as there is no Kshatriya or Vaishya caste left among them, the community comprising uniformly of Brahmanas alone after the advent of Islam in Kashmir. Optional ages have also been prescribed in the Gṛhyasūtras in case of exigencies, the time limit for a Brahmana boy for the performance of the Upanayana Saṁskāra begin is sixteen (for that of a Kshyatriya boy it is twenty two and for a Vaishya twenty four – though that is of no relevance in the present context. Today, the *saṁskāra* having become purely ceremonial, the time limit set for it in Laugākshi Gṛhyasūtras is not observed. It is performed at a convenient time, generally a few days before the marriage.

Divagon

Divagon is an essential preliminary ceremony performed by the Kashmiri Hindus a day or two prior to *upanayana* or the marriage ceremony. In the case of the latter, it is before both a boy's and a girl's marriage. The etymology of the word '*divagon*' is not quite clear, but it appears to have been derived from the Sanskrit '*devāgamana*', meaning 'arrival of the gods'. The ceremony is performed for invoking the presence of the gods, especially Ganesha and the *sapta-mātṛkās* or seven mother goddesses, to bless the initiate (or the boy or the girl to be married). It begins with a ritual bath, called *kani-shrān,* given to the initiate (to the would-be bride or the bridegroom in the case of marriage). He is seated on a four-legged wooden seat and four young unmarried girls hold a thin muslin cloth spread over his head at its four ends, as a fifth one pours consecrated water with a pitcher. These five unmarried girls represent the '*pañca kanyā*' or 'five virtuous women' – Ahilya, Sita, Tara, Draupadi and Mandodari. These days the officiating priest himself usually pours the water.

A *havan* or fire sacrifice is performed on the occasion amidst chanting of relevant mantras by the presiding priest with the initiate offering oblations while facing the east. On the eastern wall, a drawing of the *kalpavṛkṣa,* supposed to be the abode of the goddesses in Nandanavana or the Garden of Paradise invoked on the occasion, is painted with lime and vermilion. The *kalpavṛkṣa* or the wish-fulfilling tree has a *ṣaṭcakra* made at its base symbolizing Shakti, and the drawing is called *divtamūn* or the 'column of the gods'.

At about the same time *khīr* is prepared and poured into seven (earthen) plates called *divta tabúchi* or 'the plates of the gods'. *Roṭīs* of rice flour and *mŏnga warya* or fried lumps of ground *moong* (*moong* cakes) are placed over the *khīr*. Seven lumps of cooked rice are shaped as various gods and are placed on the *khīr* plates. These lumps of rice or of flour are called *divta guly* or 'offerings for gods'. The plates are consecrated with mantras and offered after Pūjā to the seven *mātṛkās* or mother goddesses, after which the *khīr* and other edibles are distributed as *prasāda* among those present, the boy's maternal and paternal aunts being the first to receive it. Of course, the *khīr* and the *moong* cakes are prepared in abundant quantity to suffice for everyone. At the end of the Divagon ceremony, ladies take the seven plates of *divta guly* in a procession to a river for *visarjana*. They go singing hymns

and folk-songs in the praise of the goddesses and praying for the long life and happiness of the boy who is being initiated (or the would-be bride or the bridegroom in case of marriage).

Prior to *divagon*, some preliminary ceremonies are also performed on the occasion of *yajñopavīta*, but these are not exactly of ritualistic nature. *Mānzyrāt* or the 'henna night' is celebrated a day before Divagon at which henna is applied to the boy's little finger and feet to give the whole function an auspicious start. The task is generally performed by the paternal aunt who applies the henna not only to the boy's finger but also to the hands of his female relatives present on the occasion. She, of course, gets cash presents from everyone in return for her pains. The ceremony, which is performed in a gay atmosphere amidst singing of folk-songs and hymns by the ladies, is more of a social nature and lends a touch of festivity to the *yajñopavīta* ceremony.

Another feature that literally adds colour to the ceremony is *krūl,* a vine scroll painted on the outer door of the house. This too is usually done by the paternal aunt who executes the design of a creeper laden with blooming flowers in different colours on a white-washed background. As the design is being painted with the sacred symbol 'Om' at the top, ladies assemble outside and sing auspicious songs. A dish called *ver* (a kind of soft. spiced food made of cereals and pulses) is prepared on the occasion and distributed with *roṭīs* made of rice flour among all present. Though painting the *krūl* - '*krūl khārun*' as it is called in Kashmiri – is a sort of ritual denoting auspiciousness, it has all the elements of folk art. In fact, it is one of the few Kashmiri folk art forms still surviving.

Preparations for Upanayana

The *divagon* over, preparations for the performance of the *yajña* for *upanayana* start. The place selected for the *saṁskāra* in the courtyard is consecrated by smearing it with mud and a canopy is set up under which it is to be performed. The area marked for the *agnikuṇḍa* is dug up generally three feet square and one-and-a half feet deep or is built with bricks with the same dimensions. *A jyoti-stambha* or *jwālā-linga* with a *ṣaṭcakara* base is drawn at the head of the *agnikuṇḍa,* with a rectangular configuration showing *ayudhas* like the mace, trident, bow and arrows topped by *a patākā:* To the west of it, seating arrangement is made for the

officiating priests, the chief of whom is called '*tsandra tāruk*, literally meaning the 'moon among the stars'. The *tsandra tāruk* sits on a special seat furnished with bolsters and cushions and leads the recital of the mantras which he reads from a manual kept on a small rectangular stool covered with a table cloth. He also monitors and oversees the proceedings of the *yajña*. The child to be vested with the sacred thread is taken to the canopy where the sacred fire is lit by his father. There his hair is shaved off by the barber in the ordinary manner if his *zarkāsay* or *cūḍākaraṇa* has already been performed. Then he is given a bath and made to wear a *snāna-paṭṭa* (loin-cloth) kept in its place by a cotton cord called *äṭya-pan* tied round his waist. He is also given an upper and a lower garment to wear and a cap with flaps covering the ears. The garments are of cotton and dyed in saffron or yellow colour generally so that he is dressed up like a *brahmachārī*. The *Gṛhyasūtras*, though, prescribe that the clothes of a Brahmana *brahmachārī* should be *kāṣāya* or reddish (that of a Kshatriya *manjiṣṭha* or dyed with madder and of a Vaishya yellow[5] (but we are not concerned with the latter two castes as these no longer exist among the Kashmiri Hindus).

The ceremony of offering clothes to the *brahmachārī* is described in detail in the Laugākshi Gṛhyasūtras along with the Vedic mantras to be recited on the occasion. The cloth is to be spun and woven on an iron loom in the house of the *brahmachārî* himself and stitched by an elderly octogenarian lady of the family. Mantras involving Savitā and Krittikā praying for the well being and long life of the *brahmachārî* are recited.

Kalaśa Pūjā

Kalaśa Pūjā is performed before the actual ceremony of Upanayana starts. The *kalaśa*, a pitcher filled with water, *vistara* (shoots of *kuśa* grass) and walnuts, is an important ritual object full of symbolical significance. It is consecrated by making *swastikā* and *śrīcakara* marks on it with vermilion (*sindoor*) and placed on an *aṣṭadala kamala* (eight-petaled lotus) drawn with lime or rice flour on the ground at the ritual site towards the east and on the left side of the *agnikuṇḍa*. Two circles representing the sun and the moon are drawn to the right of it and also a multicoloured rectangular configuration with *śrīcakra* at the base known as *maṇḍala*. The *maṇḍala* is indeed very beautiful to look at. On the right side of the

mandala are kept two pots filled with water called *kśetrapālas* or guardians of the quarters. Nearby an utencil full of clarified butter is kept on the ground along with two sacrificial ladles, *sruk* and *sruva,* for pouring the melted butter into the fire. An earthen lamp is kept burning near these ritual objects. Kalaśa Pūjā is a prolonged affair as the *kalaśa* is said to contain the entire heavenly vault and is the seat of all the gods with Vishnu occupying its mouth, Rudra its neck and Brahma its bottom. The group of the *mātṛkās* is known as residing in the middle part. Indra, Kubera Agni, Varuna, Vayu and Yama all reside inside it. The *kalaśa* also represents the ten directions along with their presiding deities. All the oceans and the earth with its seven continents rest in the interior part of it. The Vedas – Rig, Yajus, Sāma and Atharva, with all their auxiliary texts, assemble in the water pot:

> *Kalaśasya mukhe Viṣṇuḥ kanṭhe Rudraḥ samasthitaḥ / mūle tatra sthito Brahmā madhye matṛgaṇaḥ smṛtāḥ / kukṣau tu sāgrāḥ sarve saptadvīpā vasundharā / ṛgvedo' tha yajurvedaḥ sāmavedo hy'.atharvaṇaḥ / angaiśca sahitāḥ sarve kalaśantu samāśritāḥ //*
>
> [Hiranyakeśī - Brahmakarma Samuccaya: 122 B, 10-13]

Within the *kalaśa* the planets and the gods are bonded together and above the *kalaśa* there are seven Nāga deities guarding it. The *kalaśa* is worshipped with flowers and rice grains (*arghya*) and the presence of all these deities is invoked with appropriate *mantras* so that the day is auspicious for the *yañjopavīt* rite that is about to be performed. *Kalaśa Pūjā* begins with the hymn portraying the Vedas as a wish-fulfilling tree (*kalpavṛkṣa*) and praying to it for protection:

> *Omkāro yasya mūlam kramapada jaṭharam chanda vistīrṇa śākhā /ṛk patraṁ sāma puṣpaṁ, yajurucita phlasyād atharva pratisṭhā yajñac / chāyā suśīto dvijagaṇa madhupairgīyate yasya nityam śaktiḥ / sandhyā trikālam dūrita bhayaharaḥ pātu no vedavṛkṣaḥ //*[6]
>
> ['May the Veda-tree which has the sacred symbol Om as its root, the conjunction of words of the text as trunk, the metres as spangling branches, the Rigveda as leaves, Sāmaveda as flowers, Yajurveda as base, the fire-sacrifice (*yajña*) as cool shade, the twice-born as bumble bees singing the praises of its power constantly during the three twilight hours (morning, midday and evening) to be free from great fear protect us.']

Kalaśa Pūjā, it must be noted, is usually performed at the beginning of almost all major religious rites of Kashmiri Hindus.

Mekhalā or Tying of the Girdle

Mekhal is what the Kashmiri Hindus call the *yajñopavīta* or the sacred thread investiture and the whole range of ceremonies connected with it. Said to number about twenty-four, these interestingly include elements from pre-natal rituals like *garbhādāna* and *simāntonnayana* and educational rituals like *vidyārambha,* or the learning of alphabets and *samāvartana* or the end of studentship. But *mekhalā-bandhana* or *mauñjī-bandhana* is itself an important ritual performed in the process with a girdle of the *muñja* grass tied round the waist of the *brahmachārî* (called *mekhali mahārāza* in Kashmiri). Laugākshi and his commentator Vedapala elaborately describe this rite related to Upanayana or initiation of a boy. The *ācārya* or *guru* (teacher) who is to initiate the boy stations himself to the west of the sacrificial fire burning in the *agnikuṇda,* with the boy sitting to the north of it, putting wood on the fire and offering oblations to it with mantras. Some symbolic acts take place before he takes charge of the initiate to be. One of these is that the *guru* (the officiating priest) makes the boy go around the fire and place his right foot on a stone asking him to be firm and steadfast and recite mantras praying to all the gods to grant him a long life.

Then the teacher touches the heart of the pupil with his hand upwards his navel, uttering the words: "Into my will take thy heart; my mind shall thy mind follow; in my word thou shalt rejoice with all thy heart; may Bṛhaspati join thee to me. (*"Mama vrate te hṛdayaṁ dadāmi mama cittaṁ-anucittaṁ te astu / mama vācamekamanā juṣasva Bṛhaspatiḥ tvā niyunaktu mahyam //"*)[7].

After this the Brahmachari takes curds thrice and approaches the teacher requesting him to initiate him (the Brahmachari). At this the teacher ties the girdle round the waist of the youth with the words, "Here has come to me, keeping away evil words, purifying mankind as a purifier, clothing herself by power of inhalation and exhalation, with strength, this sisterly goddess, the blessed girdle" (*"prāṇāpānābhyām balamabhajantisakhā devī subhagā mekhaleyaṁ"*). Repeating these words three times, the Acharya ties the girdle from left to right thrice round. According to Dr. Rajbali Pandey, the girdle made of triple cord "symbolized that the student was always encircled by the three Vedas."[8]

The *mekhalā* or girdle in the case of a Brahmana is to be made of *muñja* grass, but it is to be replaced by a cotton girdle at the end of Upanayana. The knot can be one or more. The *mekhalā* tells the Brahmachari that it is the daughter of Faith and Penance and sister of the Sages, and that being the protector of the cosmic order it would also protect his purity and chastity as well as destroy his enemies.[9] As the *muñja* grass does not grow in Kashmir, a girdle of *kuśa* grass or of cotton is tied. And strange through it may seem, the rite is even being discarded altogether even though the *yajñopavīta* ceremony continues to be called *mekhal*. It must, however, be noted that *mekhal* and *ätyapan* are not exactly the same, the latter being *kaṭisūtra* or the cord that puts the loincloth in its place

Yajñopavīta or Investure of the Sacred Thread

The decks are now clear for the main and the most important rite – the investiture of the Sacred Thread. We have earlier referred to Dr. Rajbali Pandey's view that none of the Gṛhyasūtras have prescribed any procedure for it and that except Pāraskara hardly any of the *Gṛhya* writers have even mentioned the ceremony. It must have therefore been only after the *Sūtra* period that the *yajñ opavīta* acquired prominence.[10] It is, however, difficult to agree with Dr Pandey's view that "the upper garment which was offered to the youth was the prototype from which the sacred thread descended, though both the prototype (but not for sacrificial purpose) and the imitation were retained by the later authorities".

As for Kashmir, wearing the sacred thread was not only essential for initiating a young boy into Brahmanhood by teaching him to recite the Gāyatrī mantra but also an essential pre-requisite that made him eligible for marriage. That is why at present the *yajñopavīta* ceremony of a boy is mostly performed a few days before marriage, though cases of performing it at a younger age too are not infrequent. Performing the ceremony at a later age has scriptural sanction also. One of the considerations for its performance just before the marriage is to save on expenses which have become quite heavy, because of the ostentatiousness that now-a-days accompanies it. And as in Kashmir as many as twenty four ceremonies are rolled into one, making it a prolonged affair, the constraints of time are also a consideration. It is because of this that some people now prefer to have it performed in the Arya Samaj way, some even going to an Arya Samaj temple for the purpose and some calling an Arya Samaj priest to home. In any case, the *yajñopavīta* ritual

continues to be retained by the Kashmiri Hindus even in their present state of dispersal.

The astrologically chosen auspicious moment for investing the boy with the sacred thread is generally strictly adhered to. The boy is made to take a few steps towards the north and it is his father who first puts the three cords of the sacred thread around his neck, which is later replaced by the set of three cords which the priest makes him wear with the mantra "*yajñopavītaṁ paramaṁ pavitraṁ*". In the meanwhile the boy is made to look at the sun. He is to put on another set of three-fold cords on being married – one for himself and one for his wife. He is then brought back to his place in front of the sacred fire while the priest puts wood on it and offers oblations with appropriate mantras. It may be interesting to note that these offerings are of materials like *jāyaphal* (nutmeg), scraped coconut, dried apricot and other dry fruits mixed with brown sugar. While the father of the boy has a definite religious role to perform, his mother and other close relatives also gather around him with the ladies singing auspicious songs to make it a colourful occasion socially, with everyone rejoicing and having a sense of participation. A few new features, peculiarly regional in character, not mentioned in the scriptures, are introduced at this stage. We are describing some of them below:

(a) Nārivan Khārun

While the "*mekhali - mahārāza*" (the *batu*) is putting on the Sacred Thread, the ladies of the family enact a performance which appears to be a feature borrowed from the *simāntonnayana saṁskāra* to which we have referred earlier also. With the help of twigs of the mulberry tree (instead of *udumbara* or the fig tree) husbands of the married ladies of the family put through the hair of their respective wives strands of *nārivan,* a consecrated red protective cord or *rakshā sūtra,* in a manner that they dangle behind their ears along the side of the strings of their *dĕjihors* (an ornament worn by married Kashmir Hindu women). It is believed that this helps newly married women to become mothers soon. Only those women whose husbands are alive take part in the ritual that is performed silently without any mantras. Obviously it is a mix-up, but how it took place is not known. Yet it is a feature that makes the sacred thread investiture ceremony quite colourful with women wearing the *nārivan* looking quite special and distinguished.

(b) *Ṭěkytāl*

Ṭěkytāl, like *krūl,* is more of a ritual art than a religious ceremony. It is the figure of the *śricakra* over a rectangular configuration with vermilion or saffron-paste and is painted on the top of the headgear of ladies on the occasion of Yajñopavīt. As an option to painting, the design of the *ṭěkytāl* is cut on coloured or golden paper and then pasted on the ladies' head-dress. It may be noted that while only the ladies of the house are decorated with the *närivan,* the *ṭěkytāl* is painted, or pasted on the headgear of all the female relatives present on the occasion. *Ṭěkytāl* shows how deeply Shaktism or the mother goddess cult had influenced the social and religious life of Kashmiri Pandits. *Ṭěkytāl* was also known as *ṭekypūts* when Kashmiri Pandit women would wear a particular kind of headgear known as *pūts* – a long head-dress shaped like the hood of a snake at the top and tapering into two tail-like formations at the bottom. Some are of the opinion that this is because of the influence of the Naga cult on Kashmiri religious life, hut this seems to be doubtful because different kinds of coiffeurs were in vogue among Kashmiri Hindu women in different ages.

(c) *Vāridān*

Vāridān is yet another interesting and typically local feature in the Yajñopavīta ceremony of Kashmiri Pandits. *Vāridān* is a kind of hearth specially got made for the occasion by a potter. It has thirty-six holes on which thirty-six *sanivāri* or small earthen pots are placed for cooking rice. The word *vär,* means a small earthen pot, and *dān* means a hearth. The thirty-six holes are said to correspond to the thirty-six categories mentioned in the Kashmiri Shaiva scriptures as the basic constituents of manifestation. The thirty-six categories of Kashmir Shaivism are : *paramaśiva, śakti, sadāśiva, īśvara, śuddhavidyā, māyā, pañcakañcuka, kalā, vidyā, rāga, kāla, niyati, puruṣa, prakṛti, buddhi, ahaṁkāra, manas,* the ten *indriyas* (five perceptual or *jñanendriyas*); five motor or *karmendriyas, pañca tanmātrā* (five subtle elements) and *pañcamahābhūta* (five gross elements). Rice cooked in the *sanivāri* is meant for offering oblations into the sacrificial fire. As the *sanivāris* are very small, very little rice can be cooked in them. So rice is cooked in a large pot separately and the *sanivāris* are filled only ceremonially for oblations.

Having worn the sacred thread, the Āchārya prepares the boy for other ceremonies so that he can begin his life as a Brahmachārī. He gives him specific instructions about how the sacrificial cord is to be worn on different occasions. A householder should suspend it over the left shoulder so that it hangs from left to right, he explains, while performing auspicious rites such as fire-sacrifices, offering of daily oblations to the domestic fire, rites pertaining to marriage, pregnancy, child birth, tonsure, initiation etc. Wearing the *yajñopavīta* in this manner is known as *upavīti*. When inauspicious ceremonies or rites connected with the ancestors are to be performed the householder should suspend the sacrificial cord over his right shoulder so that it hangs towards the left. When one wears the *yajñopavīta* in this position, he is known as *prācīnavīti*.

The *Mṛgājina* or Deerskin

Now the Āchārya (priest) gives him the skin of a deer to wear. The Laugākṣi Gṛhyasūtras prescribe:

> *"anāhanasyaṁ vasanaṁ carīśnu parīdam vājyajinām dadheyamiti vacayannaineyam carma brahmaṇya prayacchhati vaiyāghraṁ rājanyāya rauravaṁ vaiśyāya?*[12]

That is, the skin of a black deer should be given to a Brahmana for wearing as an upper garment, the Kshatriya the skin of a tiger and the Vaishya that of a Ruru deer. Today the skin of the spotted deer is obtained for a Brahman boy for ceremonial wearing; the other two castes virtually do not exist among Kashmiri Hindus. Dr. Rajbali Pandey quotes the *Gopatha Brāhmaṇa* as saying that "the deerskin was symbolical of holy lustre and spiritual pre-eminence". It inspired the Vedic student to "attain the spiritual and intellectual position of a Rishi.[13] At the time of receiving the deerskin, the Brahmachari is made to look at the sun with the mantra "that eye" (*taccakṣur devahitam*).

Daṇḍagrahaṇa or Handing Over the Staff

The Āchārya (priest) now hands over a staff to the Brahmachari so that he may set upon his journey as a traveller on the path of knowledge. Laugākshi prescribes that the staff should be of *palāśa* wood for a Brahmana: *"palāśam*

daṇḍam brahmaṇāya prayacchati."[14] As *palāśa* wood is not available in Kashmir, the *brahmachārī* is given a staff of the mulberry wood which is readily available. The staff should be with bark (*saśālka daṇḍam*), straight and without any side-shoots and without any scratch, he ordains. But today what the priest hands over is a staff in name only; actually it is twig of the mulberry tree which has no utility except ceremonial, the modern student no longer going to the forest for study. The *brahmachārī* accepts the "staff" from the hands of the guru (priest), repeating after him the mantra,

> *"suśravaḥ suśrava asi yathā tvaṁ suśrava aseyvaṁ mā suśruvuḥ sauśravasaṁ kuru. Yathā suśrava devānāṁ vedasya nidhi gopo' sy evamahaṁ brahmaṇo nidhi gopo bhūyāsamiti.*"[15]
>
> ["O glorious one, thou art glorious, O glorious, one, lead me to glory. As thou art the preserver of the treasure of sacrifice for the gods, may I, a Brahmaṇa, become the preserver of the treasure of the Veda for Brahmaṇas (men)"]

He holds the staff in his hand while looking towards the sun.

Taking the Charge of the *Brahmachārī*

After equipping the initiate with a girdle, a deerskin and a staff (which were considered necessary for the Vedic student going to study at his Acharya's place), the Acharya now formally takes charge of him after some more symbolic gestures and asks him what his name is. With a respectful greeting the *brahmachārī* tells his name. The Acharya seizes the Brahmachari's right hand with the words: "By the impulse of the god Savitā, with the arms of the two Āśvins, with Pūṣaṇa's hands, I seize they hand, N.N.!"[16] "Savitri has seized they hand N.N. Agni is thy teacher", he says a second time, "Who does initiate thee? To whom shall I give thee in charge? Whose *brahmacārī* art thou?" he asks again, "The breath's *brahmacārī*", the pupil replies.[17] "To Prajāpati I give thee in charge", the Acharya says. "To the god Savitri I give thee in charge. To Bṛhaspati I give thee in charge. God Savitri, this is thy *brahmacārin;* protect him; may he not die."[18] Thus the Acharya recommends him to the protection of gods.

The Five Commandments

After having taken the *brahmachārī* thus in his charge, the Acharya makes circumambulations of the sacrificial fire and offers oblations to it and imposes the following five commandments on him: "A Brahmachari art thou. Take water. Do the service. Do not sleep in the day-time. Control your speech."[19] Vedpala, the commentator of Laugākshi Sūtras explains service (*karma*) as serving the Acharya, studying the Vedas etc. By asking him not to sleep in the day, he wants him to be always alert and not to engage in day-dreaming. And by telling him to control his speech, he means that he should not tell lies or speak harsh words etc.[20] In reply to all these commandments, the *brahmachārī* says, "Yes Sir, Yes Sir !" It may be pointed out that in the present day context, the prescriptions given at (10) and (11) above are mere ceremonial exercises performed by the priest on behalf of the initiate, repeating after the Guru five verses from the Vedas in which the Seven Rishis and the gods are requested to stimulate his (the *brahmachārī's*) intelligence. He is made to repeat a sixth verse also which is a *yaju* about milking the sweet milk of the Vedas.

At this point the *brahmachārī* is to be shown the reflection of Agni or the burning sacrificial fire in a pot of *ājya* or clarified butter. The rite has now been messed up and everyone who comes to the *yajña* to give alms is shown the reflection of the sacrificial fire in the clarified butter. According to Laugākshi's prescription, it is to precede *bhikṣā* or the round for alms. We will, therefore, describe the rites in the order prescribed in the Laugākshi Gṛhyasūtra.

The Gāyatrī Mantra

According to Laugākshi the Guru should now sit on the seat of *darbha* grass facing east and make the pupil sit in front of him. The Guru should then teach the most sacred Sāvitrī mantra in the Gayatrī metre to the Brahmaṇa pupil. (To the Kshatriya and Vaishya pupils the mantra is to be taught in other metres).[21] Some Gṛhyasūtra authors like Āshvalāyana, prescribe that the *brahmachārī* should approach the fire with appropriate mantras, bend his knees, embrace the teacher's feet and implore him to recite the Sāvitrī (Gāyatrī) mantra. The Laugākṣī Gṛhya, however, simply states that sitting in front of the sacrificial fire with his face towards the east, the Guru should teach the Sāvitrī mantra in the Gāyatrī metre, reciting it

three times – first *pāda* by *pāda,* then hemistich by hemistich and last of all the whole verse so that he is able to learn it properly.[23] It is the teaching of this mantra that marks the second birth of the *brahmachārī* and he is regarded as having entered the Brahmana fold and entitled to learn the Vedas.

Vedārambha or *Vidyārambha*

The *Vedārambha* or the beginning of the study of the Vedas and *vidyārambha* or learning of the alphabets are both mixed up in the present day performance of the sacred thread ceremony. Actually what is done is that the *brahmachārī* is made to touch the feet of the Guru (impersonated by the officiating priest) and then to take the *pañcagavya* or the five products of the cow (a mixture of cow dung, cow's urine, milk, curds and ghee). The teacher, facing eastward and offering oblations to the fire, makes the *brahmachārī* write letters with his finger on a *thālī* in which finely powdered mud is scattered. The letters can also be written on a wooden plank with a pen specially made for the purpose. The words that were generally written on this occasion were *"Om svasti siddhaṁ"* or *"Om namaḥ siddhāya"* (Salutation to the Siddhas). The script in which this was originally written was known as the *Siddhaṁ* or *Siddha-Mātṛkā* script which was an earlier form of Shāradā, Kashmir's indigenous script. The teacher would make the child read what was written and explain its meaning to him. It may be noted that in Kashmir *vidyārambha* was regarded as a part of Upanayana and not a separate *saṁskāra*. The rite is, however, going out of vogue now. Laugākshi makes no mention of *vidyārambha,* but he speaks of the *brahmachārī* taking up the study of one, two, three or all the four Vedas after putting *samidhā* on the sacrificial fire. This makes the initiate a learned man, he adds.

Ādi Darshun and *Abīd* or the Round for Alms

Sipping water ceremonially (*ācamana*) and sprinkling water over their selves, the Guru and the *brahmachārī* sit for the *yajña*. The *brahmachārī* kindles the fire with *samidhā* and oblations are made in to it of *ājya* or clarified butter, invoking the gods. Being equipped with the staff and the deerskin, the *brahmachārī* now gets ready for collecting alms for the Guru with a begging bowl (actually a *thālī*) in his hand. As we have said earlier, it is at this point that the people who have

come to attend the ceremony and to give alms for the performing priest assuming the role of the Guru or the teacher can have *ājya-darśana,* which has been distorted to *ādi-darshun,* or see the reflection of the sacrificial fire in the clarified butter after the *brahmachārī*. The butter is kept in a pot having a walnut and a coin inside it. Anyone desirous of *ādi-darshun* (*ājya-darśana*) – there is actually a clamour for it – comes forward, puts a coin in the pot, has the *darshana* with the priest applying a *tilaka* of the *bhasma* (ashes) taken from the *agni-kuṇḍa* on his or her forehead and tying the *närivan* or the protection-cord on the wrist of the hand, the left in case of a woman and the right in case of a man.

The *brahmachārī* now gets up to ask for alms (*bhikṣā*), and approaches the relatives and friends who come one by one for it. The first person he approaches, however, according to the Kashmiri custom, is his maternal aunt. Observing the necessary decorum, he addresses a lady he approaches for alms with "*bhavati*" in the beginning, saying *"bhavati bhikṣām dehi, abīd habī,"* and a man with *"bho, bhikṣām dehi, abīd hasä"*, meaning, "Madam, give me alms", and "Sir, give me alms" respectively. The expressions *"abīd habī"* for a lady and *"abīd hasä"* for a man are in the Kashmiri language and have the same meaning. The etymology of the Kashmiri word *abīd* (*bhikṣā*), is, however, not clear. There are some who believe that it is the Kashmiri form of the Sanskrit word *"abheda",* but though phonetically plausible, it does not sound convincing. The amount collected from each donor is noted against his or her name and the entire collection is then given to the presiding priest. There are some who prefer to give gold instead of cash or both as alms. Meanwhile the priest keeps on offering oblations into the sacrificial fire and applying *tilaka* and tying *närivan* to everyone who gives alms.

Samāpti or *Sampūrṇa Āhuti*

It is now time to conclude the *yajña*. The priest summons everyone for the last *āhuti,* offering them a handful each of a mixture of soaked wheat grains and flowers. This handful of grains and flowers is to be offered into the sacrificial fire as oblation and is called *athiphŏl* in Kashmiri, literally meaning a handful of grains.

Everyone makes a beeline for receiving the *athiphŏl,* making sure that he or she is present during the *samāpti* or concluding moments of the day long *yajña*. Hymns for the pacification of the gods and the planets are recited in a chorus led

by the priest/s and there is clamour for offering the *athiphŏl* into the fire as soon as the priest pronounces the last *"svāhā"*. The priest then sprinkles water from the *kalaśa* on every body present and distributes the walnuts as *naivedya,* giving one each to everyone. The water sprinkled by the priest at this moment is called '*kalasha lav*' and the walnut distributed as *prasāda* '*kalasha ḍūn*'. A vegetarian feast is next served to all present, including the priest/s, parents and close relatives of the boy who have observed a fast during the day, and all others present. The meal is treated as *naivedya* or sacrificial food. According to local custom, the maternal aunt bears the expenses of tea to the guests and the paternal aunt of serving milk to them. This has, however, no religious sanction.

Samāvartana or the Procession of the *Bramachārī*

Samāvartana or the *saṁskāra* marking the end of the student career of the boy and his return to home from the house of the Guru is treated as a part of the Yajñopavīta ceremony by the Kashmiri Hindus. It is assumed that the boy invested with the sacred thread has completed his "studies" and has come back to his family. This is regarded as a very important period in the boy's life as he is now supposed to be ready to share the responsibilities of the world and get married. Laugākshi deals with *samāvartana* and the vows imposed on a *brahmachārī* in detail.[24] In accordance with the spirit of his ordainments, the boy invested with the sacred thread is now given new clothes and shoes to wear instead of the *brahmachārī's* garments. A muslin turban is tied round his head. All these articles are usually supplied by the maternal relatives of the boy. He is made to stand on a *vyūg* or a colourful *maṇḍala* drawn on the ground. On one side of the *vyūg* is kept an earthen pot full of rice with a coin on top as a symbol of auspiciousness. A young boy, usually a friend of the '*mekhali mahārāza*' or the initiated boy, holds a parasol of flowers over his head. The initiate is then taken in a procession to the river bank for *snāna,* the ceremonial bath as a *snātaka* (one who has completed his studies). There he is given instructions by the priest who accompanies him about washing the sacred thread and performing his daily rites like the *sandhyā* etc. He is also taught how to offer libations of water to the gods and ancestors. After this he returns to his home in a procession. In the meanwhile, ladies sing auspicious songs and perform a special dance in a circle, the origin of which could go back to centuries. This is a unique feature of the celebrations.

Kŏshal Hom or the Thanksgiving *Homa*

The yajñopavīta ceremonies do not end with the *samāvartana*. On the next day a small *homa* known as *kŏshal hom* (< Skt. '*kuśala* + *homa*') is performed to thank the gods for everything having ended well. On this day rice cooked with turmeric and lamb's chopped liver is consecrated and distributed as *naivedya*. Some people even throw a non-vegetarian feast (usually) to close relatives and friends. The last ceremony is performed on the third or fourth day after the *yajñopavīta* or *mekhal* as it is called in Kashmiri. This ceremony is related to the *visarjana* of the *närivans* worn by the ladies during the Upanayana, which are consigned to water, marking the formal end of the sacred thread investiture ceremonies. On this occasion *khīr* is prepared and distributed as *prasāda*.

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CHAPTER 5

Marriage Ceremonies

Marriage, or *nethûr* as it is called in Kashmiri, is regarded by Kashmiri Hindus, like Hindus elsewhere, as the most important of all *saṁskāras*. While socially it is necessary for perpetuation of the family and the race that it ensures through progeny, it has a religious sanctity also. Through it alone can one pay off one's ancestral debt as well as the debt one owes to the gods. Among the four *āshramas* of life considered necessary by the scriptures, Kashmiri Hindus hold the *āshrama* of the householder in the highest esteem because it provides support to the entire social structure. That explains why they have a tradition of *gṛhasthī sādhūs* or householder saints, who worship God without renouncing the world or the responsibilities towards their families. And since entering married life is considered to be a religious duty, performance of sacred rituals also is essential to solemnize the union of a young man and a young woman.

Again like Hindus in general, marriage for Kashmiri Hindus has always meant monogamous union. However, while widow remarriage is still frowned upon, a man is free to remarry after the death of his wife – though such cases have become rarer now. Marriage, therefore, continues to be regarded by them as companionship for whole life and a divinely ordained relationship at that. As for the form of marriage, though Laugākshi has described all the eight forms prevalent in ancient times, it is only the *brahmadeya* or Brahma marriage that is in vogue among the Kashmiri Pandits, the girl being given by father to a suitable man of good character and belonging to a respectable family. This kind of marriage, which the Sūtras consider superior to all other forms of marriage – *deva, ārṣa, prajāpatīya, asura,*

gandharva, rākṣasa and *paiśācha* – is also known as and '*and pyaṭh*' in Kashmiri. Its only bane is that it has been corrupted by the evil custom of dowry.

Another type of marriage, which is actually only a variation of the Brahma form, is called *andyut* or marriage by exchange. This kind of marriage though quite rare was mostly prevalent in remote villages or among economically weaker families. Only economically weaker or socially insecure parents would resort to this type of marriage involving voluntary exchange of sons and daughters. Sometimes three families would mutually enter this sort of an arrangement, and in that case it was called *trikavaṭa* or 'three together', but such cases were extremely rare and are no longer current. In yet another type known as '*gara pyaṭh anun*', the bridegroom goes to the bride's house and lives there as a member of the family. This method is usually adopted when the boy is not economically well off or when the girl happens to be the only daughter of her parents. In all these types, however, the same kind of ceremonies are performed.

Although the Laugākshi Gṛhyasūtras say nothing about it, *sagotra* and *sapinḍa* marriages are strictly prohibited among Kashmiri Pandits. This is among the first things to be seen while examining the family of the prospective bride or the bridegroom. The Pandits are divided into 199 endogamous *gotras* among whom social precedence is governed by the spiritual greatness or inferiority of the respective Rishis. More than *gotras,* however, it is the social status and economic position of the·family of the boy, as well as that of the girl that matters. And social position of a boy's or a girl's family was till recently determined by a high post held by the head of the family in government service for one or two generations. Preference was given to such a well-to-do or aristocratic family than trading or agriculturist Brahmins. Besides high officials, rich traders were also considered to be members of aristocracy, plebes ranking below everyone else. While all Pandits form one community, connubium or *kanyāvyavahāra* (*yonisaṁbandha*) does not exist among all of them. Thus the *Kārkuns* (literary the official class or persons engaged in white- collared jobs) would not generally intermarry with the *Gors* or persons belonging to the priestly class. This prejudice is now slowly disappearing but the prejudice against marital ties with families whose members belong to so-called inferior trades still persists to some extent. Some of the trades that are to be avoided are that of a baker, a tailor, a barber or those related to manual work. The

prospective bride's or bridegroom's family thus remains the most important consideration, its ranking or esteem determined by nobility of character, gentleness and sound financial status. Many families are avoided on moral and physical grounds also. Marriage alliances outside caste or community, though more frequent now than ever before, are an area still frowned upon. Most of the out of the community, or out of caste marriages are generally the result of the boy's or the girl's personal choice. However, marriages arranged by parents are still the norm.

The process for selecting a match for a boy or a girl begins essentially with matching the horoscopes. It the horoscopes do not tally, a match, howsoever good otherwise, is generally rejected. Other considerations are age and height, preference as a rule being given to a relationship in which the groom is taller and older and the bride younger and shorter in stature.

As for the marriageable age, the practice among Kashmiri Pandits was always to perform marriage at an age in which the two parties would be well qualified to make choice and give consent, except during the Muslim rule, particularly Afghan rule, when child marriages became common. This was probably because of Islamic influence, besides the feeling of insecurity generated among Kashmiri Hindus by the Muslim rule. Though no injunction regarding marriageable age can be found in the Laugākshi Gṛhyasūtras, the rituals prescribed in it show that marriages generally took place after puberty. Other ancient sources also point towards the fact that pre-puberty marriages did not take place in Kashmir. Child marriages continued in the Kashmiri Hindu community till the early decades of the Dogra rule, but after that the situation changed. These days it is not uncommon to see marriages taking place between boys and girls who are well into their thirties.

The next step after a match is fixed, usually through the good offices of a go-between, is the betrothal ceremony, called '*gaṇḍun*' in Kashmiri. This is only when the boy and the girl have formally seen each other and given their consent even though the marriage is arranged by their parents. Like Āshvalāyana, Gobhila and other Gṛhyasūtras, the Laugākshi or Kāṭhaka Gṛhyasūtras refer to a couple of ceremonies to be performed before marriage proper, like the '*alakṣmī - nirnodanaṁ*'[1], '*haviṣyakalpaṁ*'[2], '*haviṣyapunyāha*'[3], '*vivāha - pūrvadina nahamiśayam - agnyādi devatā yajñam*'[4] etc. which have no relevance today, most of them being rituals to remove apprehensions of the bride's so called impurities

as a woman. It cannot be said whether any of these was ever in vogue in Kashmir or not though the ritual bath given to the bride before the wedding somewhat resembles the present-day '*kani-shrān*' (<Skt. *kanyā-snānaṃ*) ceremony. Other ceremonies like the bride being taken to a pond or a source of stagnant water with the branch of a *vaṭa-vṛkṣa* (banyan tree) or any other tree used in a fire sacrifice over her head and consigning it to the water for removal of "un-Lakshmi-like (unwomanly) defects" (barrenness etc.) have no place in present day Kashmiri Hindu marriage rituals.

Ganḍun forms an important part of the preliminary ceremonies performed before marriage proper. Literally meaning bonding, the ceremony implies a kind of moral commitment by both the parties to the marriage proposal. Resembling the custom of *kanyāvaraṇa* as recorded in the Nārada Smṛti, the ceremony also indicates a sort of "parental control over their children" with their formal consent as a necessary factor in settling the relationship. According to the custom current among Kashmiri Hindus, on an auspicious day and time fixed according to astrology, the bridegroom's father goes to the bride's father, with a party with a formal proposal to ask for the hand of the bride for his son. The party includes the bridegroom's sister and younger brothers and some close friends and relatives and is received at the bride's house by an elderly lady by waving of a lighted lamp and a vessel full of water over their heads (*ālath*) The party is then treated to a sumptuous tea (or dinner) after which the bride is made to wear the clothes and ornaments brought for her by the bridegroom's parents, including a finger-ring. Then a *närivan* or a protection cord is tied round her waist and a *tilaka* applied to her forehead. These days the 'protection cord' is usually of gold. The bridegroom's father and the bride's father then solemnly exchange a flower with each other to denote their oral consent to the relationship. The bride's father presents sweets to the bridegroom's family and also a fixed sum along with a golden finger-ring and a suit for the bridegroom. The ceremony is performed without any *pūjā* or recitation of *mantras*. It is an old tradition which has come down from the Vedic times and is also known as *vāgdān,*

We have no information as to how the ceremony was performed in early or medieval times. Perhaps, the bridegroom himself went to the father of the bride for making a formal proposal and seeking his acceptance. The Laugākshi

Gṛhyasūtras do not say anything about the betrothal or *vāgdān* ceremony as such, but an oral commitment in which the bride's father gives his daughter as a 'gift' uttering *"dadāmi te dadāmi te"* ("I give my daughter to you") thrice and the bridegroom's father accepts it uttering *"pratigrahaṇāmi"* ("I accept") three times, is mentioned. This is accompanied by relevant mantras like '*samana vāh*', '*sam vo manāsi*' etc.[5]

After the betrothal or *vāgdāna*, the marriage or *vivāha* ceremonies begin usually with *garanāvay* or the house cleaning ritual. The process is the same as for *mekhal* or *yajñopavīta*. The ceremony takes place two or three days prior to the day of the marriage to mark its formal commencement. The wedding ceremonies usually begin with '*mas mutsurun*' or untying of the girl's hair. On this occasion the girl's hair is ritually untied and she is bathed, anointed, adorned with ornaments and dressed up. On this day the singing of wedding songs by women formally starts in the evening. The ritual appears to be quite ancient.

The main ceremonies that follow and constitute marriage proper are three –the *mänzyrāth, divagon* and *lagna*. Of these the first two are common to the *mekhal* and the *nethúr*. On *mänzyrāth* or the night when the bride's (and the bridegroom's) hands and feet are dyed with henna, a feast is hosted to which mostly ladies are invited. While, the bride's hands and feet and those of other ladies attending the ceremony are tastefully dyed with henna, just a little henna is applied to the middle of the bridegroom's palms. The rejoicing is, however, of the same kind, with ladies, and professional singing parties, bursting into boisterous marriage songs to the accompaniment of the *tumbaknär* (a Kashmiri folk instrument) and the *nŏṭ* or the pitcher. The *krūl* or a floral design is painted on the front-door, in the same manner as in *mekhal* and the *ver* (spiced rice – gruel) and *roṭīs* of rice-flour also distributed in a similar way.

The *divagon* has already been described in connection with *mekhal* with a ritual bath, *homa* and decoration of the bride as its essential features. There is a slight difference between the bride's *divagon* ceremony and the bridegroom's *diavagon* ceremony. In case of the bride it takes a longer time, probably to remove the 'pollution' caused by her menstruation. The bride is also specially adorned and dressed up on the occasion and made to wear the *dějihor* in the ears for the first time. The *dějihor* is an ornament that a married Kashmiri woman wears in both

the ears in a way that it dangles from a golden chain or thread. Though the *dějihor* denotes a Kashmiri Hindu woman's married status, it is not a kind of *mangalsūtra* that is to be worn by a woman as long as the husband is alive. A married Kashmiri Hindu woman, on the other hand, continues to wear the *dějihor* even after her husband's death. It is not known when exactly the *dějihor* came into vogue, but it must be a later development for there is no mention of it in ancient Sanskrit texts of Kashmir. There are some scholars who believe that the *dějihor* is shaped like a stylized *śrīcakra*. If that is the case, then it must have come as a result of strong Tantric impact on Kashmiri religious life, probably in the early medieval age. An interesting aspect of the *dějihor* is that the thread known as *aṭahor* by which it is suspended is changed on occasions like the husband's birthday. The suffix *hor*, it may be noted, means 'a pair' in Kashmiri. The lower part of the *dějihor* is usually made of gold for a newly wed young woman, but it can also be made of pearls or fine silver or gold filigree.

Lagnachīr

A day or so before *lagna* or the nuptial ceremony, the *kulguru* or family priest of the bride's parents goes with a *lagnacīrikā* (*lagnachīr* in Kashmiri) or a letter of invitation on their behalf, inviting the groom and his parents to attend the *vivāha homa*. The letter, which is in the shape of a beautifully decorated scroll placed in a silver tray, mentions the exact day, date and auspicious hour of the *lagna* and also the number of the wedding guests and Brahmanas expected to come on the occasion. He is respectfully received by the groom's side which accepts the invitation and pays *dakṣiṇā* to him for his good offices. He reads out the contents of the *lagnachīr* and is given bagels or specially baked cakes of bread and crystal sugar (sweets these days) and seen off. This is the last ceremonial act before the wedding ceremony proper.

Wedding Day Ceremonies

(1) Barāt or the Marriage Procession and its Reception

On the wedding day the groom wears a newly stitched suit and ties a saffron coloured or pink turban decorated with floral garlands round his head – a job usually entrusted to his maternal uncle. He also wears garlands around his neck for being

taken to the bride's home. A procession of wedding guests is formed in the courtyard of his house where the bridegroom is made to stand facing the east, on a *vyūg,* a circular design *or manḍal* symbolizing the cosmic circle, drawn in coloured powders. A plate of rice grains is placed on one side of the *vyūg* with a coin and some salt placed on top. An old lady of the house waves a lighted lamp round his head. The bridegroom's party then proceeds in a procession to the bride's place (a hotel or a banquet hall these days) where the groom is again made to stand on a *vyūg* amidst *vanavun* or singing of wedding songs by the ladies. Called *mahārāza* in Kashmiri, the bridegroom is accompanied by his best boy, called *pŏt-mahārāza,* who is usually the groom's younger brother or any other young boy. The bridegroom's arrival at the bride's place is announced by the sounding of a conch shell (*śankha*). *A* man stands behind the bridegroom carrying a parasol over his head. Before standing on the *vyūg* facing the east, he, along with the marriage party, is welcomed by a company of ladies. The oldest lady of the house bearing a pot of water waves a lighted lamp around his head. The ceremony is known as '*ālat,* a word' which according to popular etymology is derived from the word '*āratī*' (<Skt. '*ārātrikaṁ*'). The bride is also brought out and made to stand on the *vyūg* on the groom's left side, and the ceremony of waving lamps is repeated by the eldest lady of the house. The pair is then offered a piece of sweetmeat or sugar candy (*nābad*) by her, which they are required to nibble at by turns. This is a symbolic act believed to make their relations sweet.

The marriage procession is described in the Vedas and also in the Shakhyāyana and Ashvālayana Gṛhyasūtras. The Laugākshi Gṛhyasūtra does not describe the procession of the marriage party from the side of the bridegroom proceeding to the place of the bride's father, but it does mention what it calls *"prasthānika karma"* or the bridegroom's departure for his father-in-law's house. What is most interesting and worth noting is that after the bridegroom performs a *homa* at his home on this occasion, his sister accompanies him holding a sword in one hand and the hem of his garment in another. *"Tasmin yathoktaṁ upasaṁadhāya jaybrabhatibhir hutva paścād bhaginī sicam gṛhṇāti śastraṁ gṛhītvā."*[8] They go to a water tank in the eastern direction where the bridegroom, guarded by his sister in this manner, first "touches" the water and then proceeds towards the bride's house. No other Gṛhyasūtra mentions this ceremony.

In the Sūtra period, the bridegroom was honoured by his father-in-law by offering him *madhuparka* or a mixture of honey, curds and ghee. It was "a rare honour", writes Dr. Rajbali Pandey, "reserved for the distinguished persons of the society and the most respected relatives."[9] He was offered a seat on which *darbha* grass was strewn and water was brought for washing his feet, the right foot first, by his father-in-law. The honey mixture was given to him in a bronze vessel with a bronze cover which he partook along with the reciting of mantras. Like other Gṛhyasūtras, the Laugāksi Gṛhyasūtra describes this ceremony in detail.[10] Perhaps it is this ceremony that later developed into a full-fledged reception and feast for the entire marriage party. But it is only a social custom not accompanied by any reciting of mantras or performing of any ritual.

(2) Dvāra pūzā

After the bride's father and the bridegroom's father have greeted each other and the wedding guests have settled down in their seats to enjoy the wedding feast, the bride and the bridegroom are called for performing the *dvāra pūjā* (Kashmiri *dvāra pūzā*) ceremony at the entrance of the bride's house. The bridegroom cannot enter the house without the performance of this ceremony at which the gods guarding the gate are to be first worshipped a little before *lagna* or the nuptial ceremony. At this time the bride's father asks the bridegroom to state the purpose of his visit. "To hold your daughter's hand in marriage, Sir", the bridegroom replies, promising that from that time onwards he would treat the bride's home also as his own home. The bridegroom's parents are also present at this time and mantras are uttered to propitiate the gods, Ganesha being the first whose presence is evoked and who is worshipped after scattering of grains. The presence of *"meruprākāra devatā"* (gods of the enclosing wall of the mountain of Meru) is then invoked and they too are offered seat and worshipped according to the set procedure along with Ganesha, Dharma and Adharma with incense, flowers and grains. Ganesha (Mahāgaṇapati) is offered seat to the left, Dharma to the right, Adharma below, Dehali above and Khinkhini at all places: *"Mahāgaṇapataye namaḥ tvaṁ pūjayāmi / Om pūjaya / Mahāgaṇapatiṁ Dharmaṁ Adharmaṁ, Dehalīṁ, Khinkhinīṁ, Meruprākāra devatānāṁ idaṁ āsanaṁ namaḥ / Mahāgaṇapataye namaḥ tvaṁ pūjayāma Om pūjaya.*

Mahāganapatiṁ, Dharmaṁ, Adharmaṁ, Dehalīṁ, Khinkhinīṁ Meru Prākāra devatāḥ āvāhayiṣyāma. Om āvāhaya ...."[11]

['Salutations to Mahaganapati. I worship you. Om, you may worship. I offer seat to Mahaganapati, Dharma, Adharma, Dehalī, Khinkhinī, gods of the ramparts of the Meru mountain. I invite the presence of Mahāgaṇapati, Dharma, Adharma, Dehalī, Khinkhinī, gods of the ramparts of the Meru mountain ....']

The gods are worshipped with grains of rice, flowers, incense, lamps etc. in the manner of *ṣodaśopacāra pūjā*. Folksongs mention the names of Bhishmakrāja, Saligrām, Vāsudev and Viśvakarmā also among the gods worshipped at the threshold on the occasion. It is not known who the Bhishmakrāja referred to in these songs is, nor is it clear why he, Sāligrām and Vāsudev are bracketed with Viśvakarmā for worship. It is only after the *dvāra pūja*, and after the bridegroom states the purpose of his visit in reply to the query by the bride's father (with the priest acting as the proxy for both), that the bridegroom can enter the bride's house for the wedding rites. The bride's father exchanges *jayaphal* (nutmegs) with the bridegroom's father as he enters.

(3) *Kanyādāna (Paṇigrahaṇa)*

The bride bedecked with ornaments and clad in all her fineries takes her seat on her father's right side *("pitā dakśiṇa jānau kanyāṁ gṛhītvā")*.[12] Both face the east while the groom faces the west. After both are anointed and appropriate mantras are chanted to drive away evil spirits, the ceremony of *kanyādāna* or "giving away the bride" follows. It is an ancient ceremony performed in the *Brahmadeya* system of marriage and has been referred to in the Gṛhyasūtras. According to the *Gṛhyās* only the girl's father has the authority to give away his daughter, but in the *Smṛti* period this authority was extended to other relatives also. This provision seems to have been made to take care of the exigencies arising out of the untimely death of the girl's father. The ceremony takes place at the exact auspicious hour fixed astrologically for the *lagna,* and is witnessed by relatives from both sides, the officiating priest conducting it with recitation of appropriate mantras before the sacred fire. The priest makes the bride's father or guardian to address his son-in-law in this manner: "I offer you my daughter in marriage" – repeating the statement

three times. Showing his inclination, the groom replies thus: "Sir, I accept this offer sincerely". He also repeats his acceptance three times. Both the parties attest to the truth of this statement, saying: "This, our statement, is true. We adhere to it in all sincerety."[13]

The father or guardian of the bride again addresses the groom thus: *"Tubhyaṁ datta kumāra dharme cārthe ca kāme ca tvayeyaṁ paricaranīyā."*

["Sir, I have given my daughter to you in the attainment of *dharma* (piety), *artha* (wealth) and *kāma* (desire); you have to look after her."]

To this the groom replies, *"mahyam pratigrīhitā vad dharma cārthe ca kāma ca mahyaṁ paricarīnīyā"*

["Sir, 1 have accepted the bride in the attainment of piety, wealth and desire. Look after her I will."]

This statement is also attested by the bride's father, the groom and the officiating priest thrice.

The bride now takes her seat by the left side of her husband. The priest makes them sit face to face and looking at each other. Together they recite the mantras '*samāna vo akūtāni samāna hṛdayāni ca*' and '*sam vo manāṁsi samvrata*', repeating the resolve that their intentions shall be one, their hearts shall be one. Both pray to Agni that he may be pleased with them and bless them both. These mantras are recited to suggest the commonality of interests between both the bride and the groom, and to ensure a relationship in which the minds and hearts, desires and thoughts of both are the same.

The Vivāha Homa

After the acceptance by the groom of the bride as a gift from her father, several *homas* are performed to complete the *vivāha saṁskāra, jaya, rāṣtrabhṛt* and *abhayātana* being the main ones to be followed by *lājā homa*. While offerings of purified butter are made to the *sviṣṭkṛta agni* in these sacrifices, the groom grasps the bride's hand and addresses his wife thus: "This 1 am, that art thou; that 1 am this art thou; the *Sāman* am I, the *Ṛk* thou, the Heaven 1, the Earth thou. Come let us marry. Let us unite our sperm to beget (male) offsprings."[15] It may be noted here that after the *kanyādāna*, it is the bride and bridegroom themselves who perform the rituals.

While performing the *rāṣtrabhṛta* sacrifice, the bridegroom prays to guardian deities and gods for protection against all possible dangers that might arise in married life. This ceremony has been mentioned in the Gṛhyasūtras of Laugākshi as in other Sūtras: '*adhipatyāni juhoti*' The bridegroom says: "May Agni, the Lord of Creatures protect me; may Yama, the Lord of the Earth protect me; may Vāyu, the Lord of Celestial Space protect me; may Sūrya the Lord of the Day protect me; may Vishṇu, the Lord of the Quarters protect me...."

(Agnirbhūtānāṁ adhipatiḥ sa mavatu tasmai svāhā / Yamaḥ prithivyā adhipatiḥ sa mavatu tasmai svāhā / Vāyu antaṛkṣasya adhipatiḥ sa mavatu tasmai svāhā / Sūryo divo sa mavatu tasmai svāhā / Viṣṇur diśāṁ adhipatiḥ sa mavatu tasmai svāhā.//)[16]

The bridegroom then expresses apprehensions and fears about his future partner of life. Offering three oblations to Agni he says:

"yā te patighnī tanuraptighninte taṁ karomi svāhā / yā te' putriya tanuḥ putriyaṁ te taṁ karomi svāhā / yā te paśvyā tanuḥ paśyyaṁ te taṁ karomi"//[17]

["The harm that dwells in thee bringing death to thy husband, that I extirpate in thee; the harm that dwells in thee bringing death to children, that I extirpate in thee; the harm that dwells in thee bringing death to cattle, that I extirpate in thee."]

In these verses the natural desire to remove dangers that may come in the way of married life, like widowhood, barrenness and loss of wealth, finds expression. This ceremony is actually performed just after nuptials, but in the Gṛhyasūtras of Laugākshi it forms a part of the *vivāha saṁskāra* or the marriage sacrament.

The husband is further made to recite the following verses from the Ṛg Veda, which he addresses to the bride:

Somaḥ prathamo vivide gandharvo vivida uttare tritīyo 'gniṣṭe patisturīyate manuṣyajaḥ / Somo dadādgandharvaya gandharvo' dadādagnaye / rayim ca putranśca dadgnir mahyaṁ atho imaṁ //

(R.V. x. 85.40.41)

[First Soma had thee for his bride; then Gandharva obtained thee next; Agni

> was thy third husband, and thy fourth husband am I, born of man. Soma gave thee to the Gandharva, the Gandharva gave thee to Agni, and Agni has given thee to me for wealth and sons."]

According to Rajbali Pandey, these verses are suggestive of the evolution of the bride. He writes: "The Hindus believe that different gods preside over the different stages in the physical development of a girl and these gods are mythologically regarded to be their husbands." Pt. Bhaiyaram Sharma explains, more elaborately:

> "It (this mantra) means that, having wound the maiden (i.e. furnished her with windings or curves of the *saṁskāras*) and sowed firmly the seeds of her education for thirty months preparatory to her entrance into the second stage of life, the moon passes her on to the Gandharva Sūrya in all her radiant beauty. The sun winds her (lays her education and *saṁskāras* on such surer foundations) for another thirty months. The seeds of culture and education sown in her during the first thirty months are allowed to sprout and grow before she is transferred for similar education in *saṁskāras* – ideal womanhood, bashfulness, tenderness, fidelity, loving kindness etc. – to the Fire - god, Agni."[19]

The citation of these verses has been referred to by Haripala, the commentator of Laugākshi Gṛhyasūtras, but several other Gṛhyasūtras also give it as it is a common practice in Hindu weddings in the context of *pāṇigrahaṇa*.

Athavās or the 'Grasping of Hands'

Athavās is literally the Kashmiri for '*pānigrahaṇa*' or the Grasping of the Bride's Hand, an essential part of Hindu wedding ceremony. But while generally it is the bridegroom who seizes the right hand of the bride "for the sake of happiness", in Kashmir the bridegroom and the bride both clasp each other's hands tightly, silently, without reciting any verses. The departure from the common practice is significant as it suggests that both the partners have the equal responsibility of making their relationship firm and strong. They are made to sit hear the *kalaśa* where, they are left alone for sometime facing the east, a shawl being thrown over their hands under which they clasp each other's hands. The grip is to be kept as tight as possible all this while. Laugākshi however, describes the

pānigrahaṇa ceremony in detail with the accompanying verses. The groom seizes the hands of the bride who is standing towards the west of the sacred fire which is burning in the north. The ceremony is performed standing, unlike *athavās* in which both clasp each other's hands while sitting. The bride, herself gold–complexioned, is adorned with gold ornaments and is looking gorgeous. The husband takes her hand in his and asks her to unite with him with the desire to have sons and be as firm in her devotion to him as the mountain:[20]

> *Hiraṇyavarṇaṁ suhṛtaṁ śubhamanaṁ kanyāyā haste parigṛhya puṇyaṁ/*
> *sā putrakāmā saubhāgayā bhartre bhāva vasīyan girivat sthiraya//*

This, says Haripala, the commentator of Laugākshi Gṛhyasūtras, referring to the above verse, "is recited in Kashmir presently". The husband praises the bride for her beautiful and fresh looks, praying that all her desires be fulfilled by merely wishing. He calls her the lightening and himself the rain-giving cloud to emphasize the closeness of their relationship. When the ceremony changed to the silent clasping of hands or the *athāvas,* is not known.

The *Lājāhoma*

Lājāhoma or the ceremony of offering of parched – grains into fire, is symbolic of fertility and prosperity of the married life of the bride and the bridegroom. The brother of the bride or his substitute, known as '*lāyiboy*' in Kashmiri pours out of his cupped hands parched grains mixed with Shami leaves into the joined hands of the bride who offers them to the Fire – god. As she is making the offering, the bridegroom chants the verse '*aryaman nu devaṁ kanyā agninayakṣata,* which means: "The girl has made sacrifice to the god Aryaman, to Agni; may the god Aryaman loosen us from here and not from the husband's side, *Svāhā*!"[21] The girl, too, strews the parched grains into the fire with the corner of the winnowing basket (any basket these days) or with the fore part of her hand. What the bridegroom prays for is that his bride should in no way be alienated from him, so that they have a peaceful life at home. The girl on her part while throwing the parched grain into the fire prays, "May my husband live a long life of virility and success and may my relations prosper. *Svāhā*! May this grain that I have thrown into the fire bring prosperity to thee and may it unite me with thee."[22] The girl drops the grain in three rounds as the mantras are repeated. They go round the fire as the husband

recites appropriate mantras, and the bride throws the remaining parched grains into the fire. The ceremony concludes with the recital of the hymn '*tryambakaṁ yajāmahe sugandhiṁ patipoṣaṇaṁ*'.

Aśmārohaṇa or Mounting the Stone

Aśmārohaṇa or 'mounting the stone' is an important rite in a Hindu marriage. In this ceremony the husband makes the bride take some steps to the north and then place her right foot on a stone so that her fidelity to him becomes as firm as a stone. In a Kashmiri marriage, the bride as well as the bridegroom are made to step on the stone, both repeating the mantra: "Tread on this stone and be firm like a stone. Tread the foes down; turn away the enemies". The stone in this case is usually a mortar.

The *Saptapadī* or the Rite of the Seven Steps

When the last portion of the parched grains is thrown into the fire, the most important 'rite of the seven steps' or *saptapadī* takes place. The seven rounds that the bride and the bridegroom take around the Sacred Fire are essential for the legal confirmation of the marriage. Among Kashmiri Hindus the custom is to make the bride step over seven coins (seven heaps of rice grains in earlier times, seven hundred rupee notes or more now) following the bridegroom, the ritual being performed by Hindus everywhere. The mantras recited with every step are also the same. The bride following the bridegroom steps her right foot on each of the seven coins / currency notes, accompanied by the following mantras:

ekaṁ ise viśṇus tvanvetu /
dve ūrje viśṇus tvanvetu /
trīṇi raya poṣaya viṣṇus tvanvetu /
catvāri mayobhavāya viśṇus tvanvetu /
pañca prajābhyo viśṇus tvanvetu /
ṣaḍ ṛtubhyo viśṇus tvanvetu /
dīrghāyutvaya saptamaṁ viśṇus tvanvetu /
sakhā saptapada bhava //

["One step for sap, may Vishnu go after thee, two steps for juice (energy). may Vishnu gò after thee, three steps for the prospering of wealth may Vishnu go after thee; four steps for comforts, may Vishnu go after thee; five steps for progeny, may Vishnu go after thee; six steps for seasons. may Vishnu go after thee; seven steps for longevity, may Vishnu go after thee. *May we be friends with seven steps.*"[23]

The objects asked for in the above mentioned mantras are essential to make married life happy and prosperous. With these seven steps the bride enters the *gotra* of the groom and the formalities of a legally acceptable Hindu marriage are completed. It may be noted that here the bridegroom is considered to be a manifestation of Vishnu, the protector and sustainer of the world. The husband then showers benedictions on the bride saying. "Be mistress to thy father-in-law. Be mistress to the other daughters-in-law of the house, of thy sister-in-law, of the children, property and all".

Showing the Sun and the Polar Star

Even though the nuptials are now complete, several sub-ceremonies still remain to be performed, but these are mostly of a symbolical nature. One such ceremony is showing the sun to the bride if the marriage takes place during the day, the sun being regarded a witness to the union. The verse '*taccakṣur devahitaṁ parastāt*' ('May we look at the myriad-eyed sun') is recited on the occasion. But if it is night, she is asked to look at the Sacred Fire as a witness – '*astamite agniṁ*'.[24] She is also required to look at the Pole Star as well as Aruṇdhatī and other stars for firmness in her devotion to her husband. Whether the bride actually sees them or not, she is expected to say "'I see" when the Guru puts her a question.[25] After going through the ritual of looking at the pole star etc., which also indicates firm and life-long companionship, the Guru, reciting mantras, asks the wedding guests and relatives assembled there to bless the bride: "Come all and behold the bride. She is wearing auspicious ornaments and is extremely charming. Having blessed her with good luck, you may go back to your houses".[26] It is at this juncture that *sindūra-dāna* or the ceremony of applying vermilion to the parting of the bride's hair is performed by the bridegroom at a Hindu marriage. This tradition, which does not find mention in the Gṛhyasūtras, is not followed by Kashmiri Hindus. Nor

is the *varamālā* ceremony or the ceremonial garlanding of the bridegroom by the bride and of the bride by the bridegroom prevalent among them. However, this ceremony is increasingly becoming popular among them these days. In fact, the Kashmiri Hindus have some peculiar rituals and customs of their own. Some of them have already been referred to in connection with the ceremonies mentioned above. The following rituals are also worth noting:

(1) '*Ganga-vyas*' or Ganga as the Bride's Friend

In the manual brought out by the well-known Kashmiri ritualist, the late Pandit Keshav Bhatt Jyotshi, ceremonial entry of the *ganga-vyas* or River Ganga personified as the bride's friend represented by a young girl belonging to the bride's side is shown to take place soon after the '*madhuparka*' ceremony. She comes as the bride's confidant and takes her to a rectangular stool for a ritual bath with water having medicinal properties. Nothing is known about the origin or purpose of this ritual, but it appears that in ancient times the bride was actually led to the banks of a river by her female friends for the ritual bath. Later, during the Muslim rule, in particular the Afghan period, this custom seems to have been discontinued for fear of harassment. At present, there is only an injunction to meditate on the all-sanctifying Ganga water – *"caturvidaṁ tu yat pūtaṁ tacca gangodkaṁ smṛtaṁ."*[27] The young girl from the bride's party is supposed to be the embodiment of the holy river itself and functions as a witness to the purity of the bride's conduct and the sanctity of the marriage ceremonies. The verses recited on the occasion are '*anrikṣara santu pantha yebhi*' ('May your path be without obstacles') and '*śanno āpo dhanvanya*' ('May the blessed waters bring peace to us').[28]

(2) *Manan-māl* and *Māma Nābad*

Instead of the ceremonial exchange of garlands between the bride and the bridegroom, the mother-in-law of the bridegroom (*yajmāna patnī*) ties an auspicious garland on the forehead of both the bridegroom and the bride according to Kashmiri Pandit custom. This garland is known as *manan-māl* or *mangla mālā*. The turn of the bridegroom comes first. As the garland is being tied, he is worshipped as a manifestation of Shiva and Vishnu with flowers, incense, rice-grains, lamp etc. The worship is performed in the following manner in case of the bridegroom:

"Maheśvarāya namaḥ dakṣiṇa pade / Tryaṁbakāya namaḥ vāmapade / Īśānāya namaḥ dakṣiṇa jānau / Sivāya namaḥ vāma jānau / Bhavāya mamaḥ dakṣiṇna skandha / Śarvāya namaḥ vāma skandhe / Rudrāya namaḥ śirasi / Viṣṇave mahārājāya smālabhanaṁ gandho namaḥ"//[29]

"The right loot (of the bridegroom) with the mantra '*Maheśvarāya namaḥ*' the left foot with the mantra '*Tryambakāya namaḥ*'; the right shoulder with '*Īśānāya namaḥ*'*;* the left shoulder with '*Śarvāya namaḥ*'; the head with *"Rudrāya namaḥ'*." The bridegroom having been worshipped as Vishnu with fragrance, rice-grains, flowers, lamp, garment etc., the *mangala-māla* or the auspicious garland is tied to his forehead. In the case of the bride various manifestations of Parvati are worshipped along with Lakshmi with the mantras: "The left foot with '*Gauryai namaḥ*'; the right foot with '*Gāyatrayai namaḥ*'; the left knee with '*Sāvitryai namaḥ*'; the right knee with '*Saraswatyai namaḥ*'; the left shoulder with '*Umāyai namaḥ*' the right shoulder with '*Kāntāyanī namaḥ*'; the head with '*Bhavānyai namaḥ*'." Lakshmi, the wife of Vishnu, is worshipped with fragrance, rice-grains, flowers, lamp, garment etc, The right to left orientation in the worship of the bridegroom and the bride must be noted. At the end of the worship the groom and the bride are to be offered *nābad* or sugar candy as *naivedya* and the maternal uncle of the bridegroom is also to be respected by the gift of sugar candy (which has been replaced by sweets and cash and clothes now). The maternal uncles of both the groom and the bride, it must be noted, are to be shown respect in the Kashmiri Hindu wedding ceremony. The *nābad* or sugar candy given to the maternal uncle is known as "*mama-nābad*". Sacrificial fees and gifts are to be given to the priests performing the ritual.

(3) *Dayabata* or *Sahāśnaṁ* (The Common Meal)

In a Hindu marriage originally the ceremony of a common meal took place at the bridegroom's house after the *caturthī karma* and later turned into a conjugal feast, Rajbali Pandey informs us. Now it is performed after what is termed as "the second marriage."[30] In Kashmir however the newly-wed husband and wife dine together on the day of the marriage itself and the ceremony is known as *dayabata* (*dāya bhakta* in Sanskrit).

The ceremony is performed at the end of the *vivāhahoma* when *prasāda* is offered to the newly-wed couple who partake of it after a portion of it is offered to the *kṣetreśas* or 'Guardians of the Quarters' as sacrifice. All the dishes cooked for the wedding guests are also offered to the bride and the groom in the same plate and they offer a few morsels to each other. The idea is to remind them that food increases mutual fondness and makes people well disposed to each other. Food is the very life of animals. Good food is the best medicine. It binds hearts and minds together etc.[31]

(4) Changing the Sacred Thread

As the *vivāhahoma* continues and oblations are made into the sacred fire, the *yajñopavīta* of the bridegroom which was of three folds till now is changed. He is made to wear a sacred thread which has six folds, the additional three folds being for his wife whose responsibility he now assumes. First he is worshipped by his father in-law and then made to wear another sacred thread. This sacred thread is then replaced by yet another sacred thread having six folds by the officiating priest. He has to wear from now onwards a sacred thread with six cords throughout life.

There are other local customs and rites also, like showing the bride and the bridegroom each other's reflection in the mirror. This is perhaps due to the influence of Kashmir Shaivism which considers the phenomenal world as a reflection of the Absolute Reality. The newly-wed husband and wife are made to go around the fire three times reciting a hymn from the Vedas known as the *sūryavarga*. The hymn says that the universe is like a chariot, the sun and the moon being its two wheels. The chariot keeps going in the right direction because of the mutual agreement of the two wheels. Likewise married life can run smoothly if the husband and wife show patience and mutual harmony and do not go astray in their relationship.

(5) The Saraswati Remembered

Saraswati, the river and the goddess, both are remembered as the wedding ceremony is going on. A hymn from the Vedas is recited by the bride and the bridegroom in praise of the river Saraswati on the banks of which was located once the original home of the Kashmiri Brahmans. The river, says the hymn, distributes

its sweet waters as a mother distributes her wealth to the daughter. Praising the goddess Saraswati, to whom Kashmiri Brahmans are so deeply devoted, the husband describes her as a gracious and beautiful woman of resplendent complexion, beautiful eyes and eyebrows, and prays to her to protect the lifelong companionship between him and his bride.[32]

(6) *Posha pūzā* or Showering of Flowers

One of the concluding, and important, rituals of a Kashmiri Hindu marriage is the *posha pūzā*. The couple is made to sit under the cover of a canopy of red shawl or any other such cloth and the parents of the bridegroom shower flower-petals on them. Other close relatives also take part in this flower showering ceremony. They regard the bride and bridegroom as embodiments of Shiva and Parvati, and worship them with flowers. The verses recited at this time refer to the names of gods and goddesses, sages and seers, incarnations, warriors, famous kings and queens of the Vedic lore, pious mothers etc., perhaps to remind them of ideal children like them. After these rituals, the Kashmiri Hindu marriage comes practically to an end. The bride and the bridegroom are now blessed, wishing them a firm and loving relationship and a long happy, healthy and prosperous married life. The benedictory verses recited on this occasion say that the bride's relationship with her husband should be like that of Uma and Mahesha, Survachalā and the Sun-god, Chandra (Moon-god) and Rohinī Kāmadeva and Rati, Sudakshiṇā and Dileep, Dhriti and Vasanta, Aruṇdhatī and Vasishtha, Rāma and Sītā, Vinatā and Kashyapa, the Fire-god, and Svāhā, Ushā and Aniruddha, Damayantī and Nala, Satī and Rituparṇa, Indra and Shachī, Devakī and Vasudeva, Lakshmī and Nārayaṇa.[33] The verses pray for the well-being of the couple:

"Supuṇyāhnaṁ sunakṣatraṁ sulagnaṁ ca sumangalaṁ / Asmin vivāhakāle tu deyad Gaṇapatistu vām. Yāvad Indrādayo devā yāvaccandradivākarau / tāvat tvaṁ to sthāne'smi svairvṛtaḥ sahasampadā / āyuśca vidyāṁ ca dhanaṁ sukhaṁ te bahuputra–lābham / śatrukṣayaṁ rājasupujitaṁ ca tuṣṭaṁ grahāḥ sarvakāmān viṣyātu / suracaṇena dānena sādhuṇāṁ sangamana ca / āśīrvādena viprāṇāṁ jīva tva śaradaḥ śataṁ//"[34]

["May Lord Ganesha grant you this marriage held on this auspicious day, constellation and hour. Till Indra and other gods are there, till there are the sun

and the moon, may you act as you like and live in wealth and prosperity. May you obtain long life, learning, wealth, happiness and many sons. May your enemies be destroyed and may you be honoured by the ruler, may your planets be appeased in all respects. May you live for a hundred autumns by remaining engaged in worship of the gods, giving charity, having association with pious people and receiving the blessings of the Brahmanas".][35]

With this the marriage ceremony and sub-ceremonies come to an end.

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23. Ibid, 25.37, p. 272.

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25. Ibid. 25.41-42, p.275.
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31. Keshav Bhatt Jyotshi, *Vivāha Vidhi.* p. 52.
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34. Ibid, p. 62.
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CHAPTER 6

Funerary and Post-funerary Rites

For a Kashmiri Hindu, as for Hindus everywhere, death is not the end of life but its continuation in a separate world – the *pitṛloka* or the abode of the deceased ancestors. He sees it as a chain in the continuous cycle of births and deaths called the *saṁsāra,* liberation from which is the ultimate aim of the human soul for him. It is with this in mind that he performs the last rites of the body of a deceased kin as a *saṁskāra,* called the *antyeṣṭi,* for which an elaborate procedure has been laid down in the ritual texts. These last rites include prayers for everlasting peace of the departed soul and gifts and offerings of material objects to make his life-after-death as an ancestor as smooth and comfortable as possible. In today's circumstances, however, when the Pandits of Kashmir have been dislocated are scattered all over the world, it has become extremely difficult for them to follow these elaborate rituals and to get a suitable priest to perform them.

There is much similarity between the broad features of Kashmiri Hindu funerary and post-funerary rites and the standard Hindu funeral ceremonies, but there are many variations and modifications as far as details are concerned. One of the traditional customs is that as death approaches a person, he calls his kinsfolk and declares his intention to offer gifts to the Brahmans and the needy – gifts of food grains, of land, of money, of cow etc. The gift of a cow by a man in his dying moments has great sanctity and is considered most desirable by the sacred texts.

This is so because a cow is believed to transport a departed soul across the infernal river *Vaitaranī* and help him to reach the lower regions. As the last moments draws near, the ground is smeared with cow dung and the *darbha* grass strewn over it. The dying person is then laid on the spot thus cleansed and sanctified, with his head turned towards the south. Sacred verses of the Gita are recited to him by his close relatives, while his eldest son whispers the *brahmavidyā* in his ears. And when the moment of death finally arrives, last rites of the deceased are performed in three phases: pre-cremation, cremation and post-cremation, procedures for which are followed according to Vedic and Puranic traditions with elements from the Tantric rituals also. There is a Shivakarmī procedure also for the *anteyṣṭi*, which is quite elaborate and is performed by only a small section of the community initiated into the esoteric *Shivakarma* practices. There is no mention of the *antyeṣṭi* in the Sūtras of Laugākshi, though several *śrāddhas* have been described by him.[1]

The pre-cremation or pre-disposal rites begin with laying the dead body down on *darbha* grass on a cleansed spot on the floor, preferably in the corridor or the doorway, and pouring drops of *Gangājal* (Ganga water) or *caraṇāmṛt* (water sanctified by washing the feet of an idol – a mixture of milk, curds, sugar, water etc.) into his mouth. These days only a few drops of water are poured on the lips of the deceased. The dead body is then taken out to the courtyard for the ceremony preparatory to cremation A brief, *śrāddha* and *kalaśa pūjā* are how performed and expiatory or *papanāśa* verses recited. The ceremony is called *anatsreṭh* in Kashmiri and its performer, the eldest son or a close relative of the dead person, alone can perform the cremation ceremony. A lamp is kept burning near the head of the deceased. Diagrams of the *brahma-kalaśa, bhūtapañcaka* etc. are made with barely flour. On the *aṣṭadala kamala* or the eight – petalled lotus of the *brahma-kalaśa*, a vessel (an earthen lamp) with *viṣṭara,* water and a walnut inside is placed while the *praṇīta pātra* or vessel for pouring water is kept towards *nairaṛtya* or south-west direction containing water and sesame seeds. On the eight-petalled lotuses of the *Gāyatri kalaśa* and *astra kalaśa* also an earthen vessel (lamp) filled with water and a walnut each inside is kept. A small pitcher known as *vär* in Kashmiri is placed on the figure of the lotus of the *brahma- kalaśa*. Five vessels with water and *viṣṭara* (of two blades of *darbha* grass) are placed, while *piṇḍas* or balls of barley flour are made and kept in a plate. *Kalaśa pūjā* is now performed with offering of incense

and lamp (*dhūpa-dīpa*) and recitation of '*Omkāro yasya mūlaṁ*', the '*tat viśṇoh paramampadaṁ*' hymn, as well as the '*bhadraṁ paśyema*' prayer. Reciting the Gayātrī mantra three times, *argha* or wet rice-grains are offered to the *bhūtapañcaka kalaśa* or the pot of the five elements with the mantra, "*draṣṭre namaḥ, upadraṣṭre namaḥ, anudraṣṭre namaḥ, khyātre namaḥ, upakhyātre namaḥ, jaṭāya namaḥ, jānishya manya namaḥ, bhūtāya namaḥ, bhaiṣyate namaḥ, cakṣuṣe namaḥ, śrotrāya namaḥ, manase namaḥ, vāca namaḥ, brahmaṇe namaḥ, bhrāntaya namaḥ, tapase namaḥ.*[2]

Water is poured from the *praṇīta pātra* which is consecrated by applying a saffron *tilaka* and offering three flowers accompanied by the three mantras (1) '*Samvah sṛjaṁ hṛdayaṁ, samṛṣyṭaṁ mano astuvaḥ*' (2) '*sandhyā vah priyastanvah sampriya hṛdayāmi vaḥ*' (3) '*ātma vo astu sampriyaḥ sam priyastaḥ vo mama*'. Rice grains and sesame seeds are scattered to the east and north of the *kalaśa* and above it with appropriate mantras to ward off evil forces and to seek protection from them. The *kalaśa* and the deities associated with it are then worshipped, beginning with Ganeśa and including Agni and Sūrya.

Nārāyaṇa with Lakṣmī, Śiva with Umā, Mahāganeśa with Vallabhā, Āditya with Prabhā, the Goddesses Amā, Kāmā, Carvangī, Ṭankadhārinī, Tārā, Pārvatī, Yakṣiṇī, Iṣṭadevī, Abhayankarī, Kṣemankarī, Sarvaśatru-ghātinī, Heraka, Vaṭuka etc. Bhairavas and so on.[3] It is interesting to note how the Vedic gods are worshipped along side of Puranic and Tantric gods and goddesses. The performer of the funeral rites invokes the *kalaśmanḍala* deities, Astra Gāyatrī. Bhairava, Mahādanṣṭra, Śmaśānādhipati (Lord of the Cremation Grounds). They are offered *āsana* (seat), *argha* (rice grains), *pādya* (water for washing feet), garment, flowers, etc. Then the performer of the rites offers water for sipping (*ācamana*) and gives *dakṣiṇā* or fees to the officiating priest. Then he gives oblations of water to the deceased (father, mother or anyone among the kin who has passed away) and the *yajamāna* mentioning his name and *gotra* and the date and day of his passing away.

After worshiping the deities of the *kalaśamanḍala,* the sacred fire is lit in an earthen pot and ritual offerings of rice grains (*argha*) and sesame seeds are made into it. The *praṇīta pātra* is kept to his right by the performer of the rites who puts three flowers into it with mantras. From the *praṇīta pātra* nine oblations of water are made into the fire with appropriate mantras. Along with the *ājya* (clarified

butter), oblations and offerings of a rice-cake prepared for the rite are made with a walnut in hand and recitation of the verse "*Pituḥ antyakriyā nimittaṁ ājyaṁ arpayāmi namaḥ*" ("I am making this offering of clarified butter for purpose of the last rites of my father", or whosoever be the deceased).[4] With the completion of *kalaśapūjā* and fire-sacrifice, the dead body is given a ritual bath by relatives to purify it. The son of the deceased or his relatives then cover the dead body with a shroud which is like a large gown with holes for the head and the arms. The bath is given with water mixed with milk, curds, ghee and sesame seeds, with the son of the dead person reciting sixteen verses of the Puruṣa Sūkta of the Yajurveda. Private parts of the deceased are covered with a loin-cloth, and if he happens to be male a new sacred thread is put around his neck over his left shoulder. The nine orifices of the body are sealed with *dhūpa* (fragrant resin burnt as incense) and the forehead is marked with vermilion *tilaka* while a *pavitraka* is slipped into the ring finger. A *närivan* or protection cord is put through the ears if the deceased happens to be a woman. The body of the deceased is covered by a shroud with the Gāyatrī mantra in reverse written on it, or a '*Rāma - Rāma patta*' (a cloth with 'Rāma printed all over it). A pair of *pulahors* (Kashmiri grass sandals) is slipped into his feet. Inside the *pulahors* a little cotton is spread so that the journey to the other world does not hurt his soles. A layer of the *darbha* grass is spread on the bier, which is washed before use, and sesame seeds scattered over it. The dead body is then placed on it and covered by a white shroud. The bier is decorated with flowers and flower garlands and taken out to the courtyard and the dead body is laid on it with the head towards the south. If the deceased is old, a costly shawl is spread over the bier. Incense, camphor etc. are burnt and *ārati* (waving of lamps) is performed of the deceased by all the mourners present. *Pāpanāśa* prayers (prayers for redemption from sin) are recited on behalf of the departed one, the most common being "*Jaya Nārāyaṇa jaya Puruṣottama jaya Vāmana Kaṁsāre*", in which it is prayed that God may redeem him from the burden of sins and help him to cross the ocean of life. Other collective hymns chanted on this occasion are the famous '*Śiva-aparādha-kṣamā stotraṁ*' and the hymn asking Shiva to forgive sins starting with '*kṣyamtavyo me aprādaḥ Śiva Śiva Śiva bho Śri Mahādeva Śambho*'. Flowers are showered on the bier, which is called '*vimāna*' (an arrival vehicle for going to heaven) if the deceased happens to be old. A conch is also sounded at this time

and a *ratna-dīpa* (five-wick lamp) is waved before the dead body with the performer of the rites mentioning the month, date and day when the death has occurred and reciting the verse: *"pituḥ / mātaḥ svarga - prāptyārthāt dhūpaṁ ratnadīpaṁ karpūraṁ arpayāmī namaḥ"* 'I offer incense, lamp and camphor to father / mother".[5] He utters the name of the deceased person along with his / her *gotra.* The performer of the rites takes one of the three *piṇḍas* or cakes of barley flour in his hand uttering the words '*tat sat brahma*' ('the Brahman is the truth') and stating the name of the month and the date of death. *The piṇḍa* is placed on the bier towards the head of the deceased person with the words, *"antya kriyā nimittaṁ eṣa te bodha piṇḍah pretaḥ tripyatu"* (I offer this food pellet for the purpose of your last rites. Be propitiated, O departed spirit!").[6] All the ritual articles used in the *kalaśa pūjā* and the *homa,* including the earthen lamps, the walnuts, the pitcher etc., are then put in a basket for carrying to the cremation ground. A lamp is meanwhile kept burning in the corridor of the deceased person's house. With this the pre-disposal rites come to an end and the body is taken out from the house of the deceased person to the cremation ground.

The person who is to perform the cremation rites carries the bier to the crematorium in a procession. The person leading the funeral procession lifts it on his right shoulder at one end, with three other close relatives carrying it at the other ends. They are followed by kinsfolk, relatives and friends of the deceased person, everyone chanting '*kṣamtavyo me aprādaḥ*' on the way to the crematorium. The funeral procession stops midway at a place where the bier is put down, with the head of the dead person towards the south. At this place, called *thaka pyanḍ* (the halt for taking rest), the deceased is "shown" the sun and another *piṇḍa* of barley flour is placed on the bier on one side of the corpse with the verse

> *"tat sat brahma adya tāvat, tithau adya māsasya pakṣasya tithau vāsara pituḥ / mātaḥ antya kriyā nimittaṁ eṣa te makardhvaja piṇḍaḥ / pretaḥ tripyatu //"*
>
> ["The Brahman alone is the truth. Today on such and such day, of such and such month and such and such fortnight I offer this *makardhvaja* (medicinal) *piṇḍa* to you, O father / mother (whosoever it be), for the purpose of your last rites."[7]]

The bier is then again lifted and carried to the cremation ground where it is once more put down and a third *pinḍa* of barley flour offered to the deceased with the words: *"tat sat brahma pitaḥ antya kriyā nimittam eṣa te Yamadūta pindaḥ / pretaḥ tripyatu"* ("O father/ mother (or whosoever it be) I offer you this '*Yamdūta pinḍa*' or rice-ball for the Messenger of the god of Death") for the purpose of your last rites. Be propitiated, O departed spirit."[8]

This is the time when the shroud is removed from the face of the deceased person for everyone to have his/her last *darshana*.

After reaching the crematorium, the ground for the funeral pyre is cleansed and smeared with cow dung. Figures of the *brahma-kalaśa, jwālālinga* with an eight-petaled lotus, the *agnikunḍa* and *cittāvāsa* are drawn on the spot by the officiating priest with barley flour. The earthen pot with fire inside it, which has been brought from the house of the deceased person, is placed on the drawing of the *jwālālinga* and the *brahma-kalaśa* is worshipped with flowers and saffron paste reciting the mantra

> *"Om tat Viṣṇoh paramaṁ padaṁ / sadā paśyanti sūryaḥ / divīvā cakṣur-ata-tam / tat-viprаso vipanyavo jāgrivaṁsaḥ samindhate/ Viṣnor-yat paramaṁ padaṁ"*
>
> ["Om, that Vishnu's seat supreme, the strong ones ever see (distinctly). As roams the eye in the sky with unobstructed gaze."[9]]

Nine oblations of water from the *pranīta pātra* are poured into the sacred fire with the mantra:

> *"Ṛtamvā satyena parisamūhyāmi /satyaṁ tvartena parisamūhyāmi / ṛta satyabhyantva parisamūhyāmi /ṛtamvā satyena paryukṣāmi/ ṛta satyabhyantvā paryukṣami / ṛtamvā satyamvā parisincāṃi / satyaṁ tvartena parisincāmi."*[10]

With a walnut in the hand, the performer of the cremation rites offers oblations of clarified butter into the sacred fire with the *sruva* spoon. The oblations are accompanied by the mantras '*ayuṣah prāṇaṁ santanu svāhā*' etc. The following mantras are to be recited only by the person performing the last rites while making *ājya* offerings into the fire:

1. *Om āyur - yajñena kalpatāṁ svāhā*
2. *Om prāṇo yajñena kalpatāṁ svāhā*
3. *Om apāno yajñena kalpatāṁ svāhā*
4. *Om vyāno yajñena kalpatāṁ svāhā*
5. *Om udāno yajñena kalpatāṁ svāhā*
6. *Om samāno yajñena kalpatāṁ svāhā*
7. *Om cakṣur yajñena kalpatāṁ svāhā*
8. *Om śrotraṁ yajñena kalpatāṁ svāhā*
9. *Om vāk yajñena kalpatāṁ svāhā*
10. *Om mano yajñena kalpatāṁ svāhā*
11. *Om atmā yajñena kalpatāṁ svāhā*
12. *Om brahmo yajñena kalpatāṁ svāhā*
13. *Om jyotir yajñena kalpatāṁ svāhā*
14. *Om svayar yajñena kalpatāṁ svāhā*
15. *Om priṣṭhaṁ yajñena kalpatāṁ svāhā*
16. *Om yajño yajñena kalpatāṁ svāhā*

The above mantras show that cremation is regarded by the Kashmiri Hindus as a kind of *yajña* or sacrificial offering into the sacred fire. The *cittāvāsa* is drawn at the consecrated spot where the pyre is to be lighted. Nine pegs are to be fixed on the specific points shown on the diagram with its lines looking like a mesh or a net. The *cittāvāsa* can also be made with thread. Before the pyre is lighted, worship of the deities presiding over the *cittāvāsa* is performed after reciting the Gāyatrī mantra three times. The following mantra is recited seeking permission from these deities for performing their worship: *"Iśāne gaganyutasya Iśānasya / agneye suketu yutasya Rudrasya / nairṛte sajalayutasya Viṣṇoḥ / vāyave vāyuyutasya Iśvarasya / madhye pṛthivīyutasya brahmaṇaḥ / Indrasya Yamasya āpampate / Somasya pṛthivīyutasya carkyaḥ / vidhāryaḥ Pūtanāyāh pāpa rakṣyaḥ /Ṣaṇḍasya Aryạmnaḥ/ Jambakasya Piliprcchasya cittāvāsa devatānāṁ ātmano pituḥ antyakriyā nimittaṁ archaṁ ahaṁ kariṣye / Om kuruṣva"//*[12]

Assuming the permission as granted, the deities are worshipped in the standard *ṣoḍaśopacāra* format. Their presence is invoked at the place where the pyre is to be lighted:

"Cittāvāsa devatābhyāḥ āvāhayiṣyāmi / Om āvāhaya". ["Deities of the *cittāvāsa,* I invoke you, Om, invoke."]

The seat is then offered to the deities:

"Cittāvāsa devatānāṁ idaṁ āsanaṁ namaḥ"

(Deities of the *chittāvāsa*. I salute you. Here is seat for you)

Pādya or the water for washing feet of the deities is offered:

"Pādyārthaṁ udukaṁ namaḥ / Bhagvantaḥ pādyaṁ-pādyaṁ

["Salutation. Here is water for washing feet".]

"Cittāvāsa devatābhyāḥ idaṁ vo pādyaṁ namaḥ"

["Deities of the *cittāvāsa,* salutation to you. Here is water for washing feet".]

With this mantra water is poured on the *cittāvāsa* and this mantra is recited:

"Cittāvāsa devatābhyāḥ idaṁ vo arghyaṁ namaḥ"

["Deities of the *cittāvāsa,* salutation to you. Here is an offering of rice grains to you".]

All the pegs of the *cittāvāsa* are smeared with vermilion, beginning from the *iśāna koṇa*. The following mantras are recited:

"Cittāvāsa devatābhyāḥ samālabhanaṁ gandho namaḥ"

["Deities of the *cittāvāsa*, salutation to you. Here is an offering of fragrance for you."]

In the same manner flowers, garments and sacrificial food are offered to them and also water for rinsing mouth (*ācamana*). The worship ends with offering of a coin (money) as *dakṣiṇā* or sacrificial fees. The offering of garment is made in the shape of a cloth or a shawl to be spread over the dead body. Worship of the *cittāvasa* or the *mayājāla* is a unique feature of Kashmiri Hindu funerary ceremony and is quite interestingly a part of Kashmir Shaiva rituals. It is symbolic of the departed soul's liberation from the snares of this illusory world.

The pyre is built on the *cittāvāsa* and the dead body is placed on it with its head to the south and face to the east. Small sticks of wood with cotton spread over their ends are dipped in the ghee and ignited with the fire brought from the house of the deceased person. The performer of the rites goes thrice around the fire with his left side towards it. Then he lights the pyre with a piece of lighted wood, from the head if the deceased is a male and towards the feet if it is a female. Other sticks of burning wood, known as *ulmūka,* are thrown on the pyre. After the pile is set to fire, the performer goes thrice around the burning body, sprinkling water from a water pot which he places on his left shoulder. On completing the third round, he breaks the water-pot on an axe or a stone near the head of the dead body reciting the mantra: *"Namo mahimne ut cakṣuṣe mahtaṁ pitā uru tat gṛnimaḥ huto yahi pṛthibhi – daivanair auṣadhiṣu pratiṣṭhā śarīre.*"[13] Then with two *darbha* blades in hand he recites, *"pituḥ* or *matuḥ* (or whosoever be the deceased) *antya kriyā nimittaṁ cittāvāsa devatānāṁ pūjanaṁ achidraṁ astu"*. Everyone present at the cremation chants *"Om yo Rudro agnau ya āpsu ya auṣadhīṣu yo vanaspatiṣu yo Rudro viśva bhuvana viveṣa tasmai Rudrāya namo astu devaḥ"*[14] and throws a piece of wood on the burning pile as a last tribute to the deceased. This rite resembles the *pūrnāhuti* or 'last oblation' offered in a sacrifice and is also called '*kapāla kriyā*'.

Those who have attended the funeral at the cremation ground now disperse, but before leaving they take a bath at a nearby stream and offer a handful of water and sesame seeds to the dead person. These days, however, people only wash their hands and face at the crematorium and take a bath at their own homes, changing the clothes they were wearing while attending the cremation rites. Before returning to the house of the deceased, a fire is lighted with dry grass outside the crematorium. This is called "*tshāy zālin*" or "burning the shadow", implying that the mourners, except the family members and very close relatives are now free from defilement caused by death. According to some it is the dread that the deceased may follow as a *preta* or disembodied spirit that lies behind this ritual. Usually the mourners stand in two rows outside the house of the deceased and go to their own homes after the performer of funeral rites enters.

Aśauca or Impurity

For those who have handled the dead body and performed its last rites, the whole family and closest relatives of the deceased, ten days following the death constitute a period of *aśauca* or defilement, called *hontsh* in Kashmiri. This impurity as a consequence of death is a kind of taboo that extends to them. People are prohibited to take any cooked food or drink anything from the hands of these persons supposedly polluted by death. In case anyone takes any food from them by mistake during the period of *hontsh* then he or she too is supposed to be polluted for a period of eleven days. In present times the rules of *aśauca* are generally not observed strictly. Defilement is, however, caused by the death of a grown-up person only and not of a child. In the case of a child's death, the defilement is limited to its parents alone. It cannot be said with any certainty what this *aśauca* or defilement is exactly due to. Giving his views about it, Dr. Rajbali Pandey writes: "It is not clear what this taboo is due to. Is the corpse feared in and for itself, or as a vehicle of death, or is it dreaded owing to its connection with the disembodied spirit? Whatsoever may be the religious or sentimental motive underlying the taboo, one thing is evident that, to a great extent, it was based on the contagious nature of the corpse. So the survivors, owing to their contact with the dead person during his sickness and with his corpse alter his death, are severed from the society on sanitary grounds".

During the ten days of the *aśauca* period, offerings are made every day to the dead as "the last item of the funeral ceremonies". These offerings are of food (*piṇḍa*) and water. They are offered in the belief that the dead person is still alive for these ten days till he joins the *pitras,* or the manes. The offerings provide him with food and drink during his journey to the abode of the ancestors. It is only after ten days that his *preta* condition ends and so does the period of impurity. For all these ten days a lamp is kept burning in the house where the death has taken place. The ritual texts prescribe offering of a *piṇḍa* of rice or a rice-ball to the dead on the first day. This is to be cooked in water not kept overnight. Water for oblation is also poured out for him.

Asthi Sañcayana

After consigning the body of the deceased to the flames, one last obsequial rite remains to be performed – collection of the unburnt bones of his body. Known

as *asthisañcaya,* this rite is performed after the first, third or fifth day of cremation. Going to the cremation site, the performer gathers the bones from every part of the body in an urn for consigning to sacred waters. These bones include what is called *"puruṣa"* or the top vertebra which is supposed to be of the shape of a human body and is, therefore, regarded as sacred. After cleaning the site and washing it, the performer of the funeral rites takes this urn to a sacred river, which used to be generally the confluence of the Vitasta and Sindh rivers at Shadipur in Kashmir, called '*Prayāga*' by the Kashmiri Hindus. Some people would take the urn to Hardwar for consigning the bones into the holy waters of the Ganga. The ceremony of consigning the bones to the waters is accompanied by a *śrāddha*. The performer of the cremation rites, or the *dāha - saṁaskāra* as Kashmiri Hindus call it, is usually accompanied by a few close relatives who help him perform the rite smoothly and properly. In Kashmir bones were consigned to the waters at several other sacred places also, including a lake called Gangabal which is formed by the stream called Harmukutganga and is regarded very sacred by Kashmiri Hindus. At present, however, Hardwar is the place where they generally go to perform the ceremony.

The Tenth Day *Srāddha*

Post-obsequial ceremonies continue till the tenth day when the chief mourner goes to the banks of the river and shaves his head to indicate the end of the mourning. All blood relations and other relatives also gather there to offer oblations of water and sesame to the deceased. Rice is cooked on spot to prepare *piṇḍas* or rice balls which are offered to the departed soul and Vaivasvata Yama to satisfy their hunger. The performer takes a rice ball and offers libations with handfuls of water. The purification bath is taken with the mantra "*Om āpah naḥ śosucadaghamagne śuṣgdhya rayim āpa naḥ śoṣucadaghaṁ*".

After the ritual was over, clothes and other articles of personal use of the dead person were given away to *pā̃-yŏchh,* a Brahmana of low status who sustained himself on such alms, in earlier years. Such Brahmans are not available in urban or rural Kashmir now and the custom is no longer in vogue. With the exodus of most Kashmiri Hindus from Kashmir, it has become a matter of the past. Libations of water with sesame seeds (*tilodakaṁ*) are given on the tenth day for all the ten days since the

date of death, and so is the offering of *pindas* or rice balls made for all these days. The performer prays for the liberation of the dead person and his own self, sitting on a seat of southward pointed blades of *darbha* grass strewn on a cleansed stone, or a wooden plank or a spot on the banks of the river consecrated by sprinkling water. To perform the *śrāddha* ritual he bends on his left knee (*vāmajānuṁ bhūman midhāya*), and mentioning the name of the deceased (father or mother) offers incense, rice-grains, flowers, lamp, food, water and sesame seeds, honey, ice-cold beverage, milk etc., saying:

> *"eṣa te gandaḥ pitaḥ eṣa te argha, eṣa te puṣpaṁ / eṣa te dhūpaṁ eṣa te dīpa, eṣa te bhakṣya-bhoja- phala-mūla baliḥ / pituḥ eṣa te tilamadhu - miśraṇaṁ - udakapātraṁ ācmanīyaṁ / eṣa te kṣīrapānaṁ / eṣa te madhupānaṁ / eṣa te tilodakaṁ, eṣa te udakatarpaṇaṁ, himaṁ - himaṁ rajataṁ - rajataṁ"//*[16]
>
> ["O Father (or Mother), here is fragrance for you, here are rice-grains for you, here are flowers for you, here is incense for you, here is lamp for you, here are food-stuffs, fruit, roots etc. for you. O Father, here is the pot of sesame water mixed with honey for your sipping (*ācamana*), here is milk for you to drink, here is honey, here is sesame-water, here is libation of water, here is ice, here silver" (the vessel of the dead person). Then covering the *preta-kumbha* along with *viṣtara,* the performer utters:
>
> *"Śmasāna-anala dagdhosi partyaktosi bāndhavāḥ*
> *idaṁ nīraṁ idaṁ kiṣīraṁ preta atra snāhi āpaḥ piba."*
>
> ["You have been burnt in the fire of the cremation ground, you have been forsaken by your kinsfolk, here is water for you, here is milk for you. O spirit, take your bath here, drink this water."]

Both the *preta* (disembodied spirit) and *Yamadūta* (Messenger of Death) are requested to drink the water, the milk, the honey and eat the sesame seeds, the foodstuffs, the ghee, the molasses, the fruit, roots etc. The performer offers flowers to the *preta-kuṁbha* and reciting the mantra for protection; he prays to the *pitaras,* to the *preta,* to Yama and to Jātaveda to grant him liberation from the thirty-six categories of which the phenomenal world is supposed to be made. He prays for his long life, sound health, prosperity and lustre to his own self too. He shaves his

head, praying for redemption from sin. Then holding the *preta- kuṁbha* on his left shoulder he throws it into water with the mantra '*idaṁ puruṣa śārdūlaṁ vimalaṁ divyamuttamaṁ / pretolokeṣu pānīyaṁ mad-dattaṁ upttstithau*' in case of a male and '*idaṁ svāditi kalyāṇi vimalaṁ divyuttamaṁ*' in case of female.[18]

The Eleventh Day Ritual

Śrāddhas are performed on the eleventh day also. After offering scents, flowers, incense, ghee, sesame and water to the departed soul and the *pitaras* propitiating them with fruits, roots and obeisance, the performer of the rites worships Brahmans on this day with food and money and other gifts. "If the Brahmans are honoured, the *pitṛs* become delighted"[19] writes R.C. Prasad in his book 'The Shrāddha'. The Shastras, however, ordain that only Brahmans with excellent qualifications should be invited to a *śrāddha* feast. They should be given ample cash and gifts as fees for the peace of the soul of the departed. It is on this day that the period of *aśauca* comes to an end.

Sapinḍīkaraṇa or the Twelfth Day Ritual

On the twelfth day of the cremation, the ceremony of '*sapinḍīkaraṇa*' or uniting the *preta* with the *pitaras* is performed. Called '*pyanḍ milavan*' or '*bahim dŏh*' in Kashmiri, this ceremony is regarded as most important as through it the soul of the dead person passes into the *pitṛloka* or the abode of the manes. Till he joins them he remains a *preta* or a disembodied spirit.

The ceremony begins with *Viṣṇu pūjā*, *Kalaśa pūjā* and invoking of all gods after having sipped water for self-purification (*ācamana*) with the syllables '*viśve devasaḥ*'. Permission is obtained from Brahmans and sesame seeds are spread and water poured from the vessel. The performer utters the mantra: "I annihilate everything that has impurity in it. All Asuras and Dānvas have been killed by me. All Rākṣas, Piśācās, Yakṣas and all Yātudhānas (demons) have been killed by me."[20] Having prayed to Viṣṇu for protection and uttering the Gāyatrī mantra, he expresses the intention (*sankalpa*) of performing the *sapinḍikaraṇa śrāddha*. Wearing the sacred thread over the right shoulder and mentioning the names of his forefathers up to the great-grandfather along with his *gotra* and with the scared thread on the left shoulder and reciting the syllables '*śannodevī*,' he offers water for washing

the feet of the gods and then offers them seat strewing two *darbhas*, rice-grains (*argha*), flowers (*puṣpa*), lamp (*dīpa*), incense (*dhūpa*) and garment (*vāsaḥ*). With the sacred thread again over the right shoulder, he invokes the forefathers for the '*samāna sapinḍīkaraṇa*' of his deceased father or mother and invites them to partake of the offerings of the *śrāddha* together with the *preta* (departed spirit). The forefathers or *pitaras* are addressed with respect as '*saumya*' or 'benevolent'. The forefathers who are on the earth, on the mountains, on the sky, in the waters or the seas, who are buried underground, are requested to come from their places with the "speed of the mind" (*manojave*) for sharing their part of the sacrificial offerings and for getting all their desires fulfilled:

> *"āgaccha pitaro manojavāsaḥ pitaraḥ pitaroḥ śundhvaṁ / āpā me yantu pitarān bhāgadheyaṁ urjahutaḥ salilāt samudrāt / asmin yajñe sarva - kāmānllabhdaṁ akṣiyamānamānanupa evatsenan/"*[21]

Those who are standing or running or unhurt are all invited, including maternal forefathers to receive the libations offered. The forefathers are invoked with the syllables *uśāntastva* with two blades of *kuśā* grass extended to them. Thereafter water, fragrance, flowers, incense and lamp are offered with the sacred thread hanging over the right shoulder. The forefathers are offered food in gold, silver or copper vessels.

Sacrificing in the same manner for his maternal ancestors, the performer alters the verse to:

> "Wherein my mother has done amiss, abandoning her duty towards her husband, may my father take that sperm as his own; may another one fall from the mother. *Svadhā*! Adoration!"[22]

In the same way he utters a second and a third verse, changing the mantra to 'wherein my grand-mother', 'wherein my great-grand-mother'.

> [*"yanme mātā pralulobha yaśca caraṇānuvrataṁ tanme retaḥ pitā uriktaṁ mābhūraṁjo've pādyataṁ, yasbuśṭhanti yanme pitāmahī pitāmaho vṛktaṁ, yastiṣṭhanti – yanme prapitāmahī prapitāmaho vṛktaṁ... "*]

Four vessels are then kept apart filled with water, sesame seeds and fragrances. Three of these are offered to the *pitaras* while the fourth is offered to the *preta*. The *preta - pātra* (the vessel of the dead person) is sprinkled with waters. The

libation of the *preta - pātra* is poured into the *pitra* pot or the vessels of the forefathers with the two syllables '*ye samāna*' ('These equal' etc.) Food offerings are made to the Vasus. Rudras, Ādityas and manes to satisfy them. *Ājyabhāga* oblations are offered into the sacrificial fire. Lumps of food are put on *darbha* grass with south-pointed ends for the fathers. The oblations are offered to Agni, "the carrier of *havya*", and Soma with the fathers with the exclamation *svadhā* made with each offering.

Piṇḍas or rice balls are offered to both the *pitaras* and the *preta,* portioning them into six parts and putting three *piṇḍas* from the channels (*karśu*) meant for the *pitaras* into the channels meant for the *preta,* while the deceased and the paternal as well as maternal fathers are propitiated with food and water as well as honey, milk and sesame seeds, *bali* or propitiating offering of portions of food are made to the cow, dog, crow, etc. and the *kṣretreśas* or guardians of the quarters. Offerings of food and water are made by the performer to satisfy not only the fathers but with the remaining food all those in the family who have been cremated or not cremated ('*dagdhaśca ye jīva ye'pyadagdhaḥ iha kule mām*'), those who have not received their share in the *yajña* offerings, so that they finally obtain peace. With the deceased also joining them, the *pitaras* are bidden a final adieu and asked to go away after praying for their place in the Vaikuntha and asking permission from the *kṣetreśas* or guardians of the quarters. The ceremony concludes with payment of the sacrificial fees to the Brahmans and giving them gifts in kind, like gold, silver, grass-sandals, wooden sandals, fire-pots, staffs etc.

Funeral Rites of the *Śivakarmis* or *Śiva Nirvāṇa Vidhi*

The funeral and post-funeral rites mentioned above form the norm for Kashmiri Brahmins and are generally based on the ordainments of Laugākshi and other practices most of which are followed with by Hindus in general. They also incorporate several features of what is known as *Shivakarma* which is followed by the *Shivakarmis* – an esoteric sect whose numbers are relatively few. Their practices appear to be based on Shaivagamic rituals of the non-dualist Kashmir Shaiva School. These rituals are lengthy, elaborate and very complicated as far as funeral and post-funeral rites involving a series of *pūjās, nyāsas, mudrās, maṇḍalas, yāgas, homas* and mantric utterances are concerned. For the *Shivakarmis*, Shiva

alone is supreme and is to be worshipped along with the deities of *Shiva brahmāṇḍa* or the Cosmos of Shiva. These deities include Ganesha, Durgā. Surya, Kumāra, Lakshmī - Narāyaṇa, Gāyatrī, the Bhairavas Mahādaṇṣtra, Kāla, Karāla, Madotkaṭa Smashānādhipati, Vaṭuka, Amriteshvara. Kapāleshvara, Manmatha, Vidyārāja, Bahurūpagarbha and other Bhairavas worshiped in Kashmir, various manifestations of Shakti, the eight *kṣetrapālas* or the guardians of the quarters, *navagrahas*, the guru and so on. Shiva is the Supreme Being and the source of all activity in the world and he is worshipped in his five forms – Sadyojāta, Vāmadeva, Aghora, Īśāna and Tatpuruṣa. So there is no invocation to gods (*āvāhana*), no consecration ceremony of an image (*prāṇa-pratiṣṭhā*), no chanting of Vedic mantras. Nor do things like observance of the *aṣṭakas* have any place in the ritualistic pattern of the *Shivakarmis*.

The dead body is regarded as *Shiva svarūpa* or a form of Shiva himself and not just a corpse. It is given a ritual bath and then worshipped from top to toe before cremation. Shiva *stutis* or hymns to Shiva are recited to mark the *antyeṣṭi* ritual instead of the usual *pāpanāśa* mantras or mantras for redemption from sin. The purpose of *Shivakarma* rites is to achieve "*Shivanirvāṇa*" or liberation of the deceased and his ultimate union with Shiva. Another important feature of *Shivakarma* is utterance of the mystic syllables '*juṁ*' or '*juṁsaḥ*' with Om at the beginning and the Tantric '*astrāyaphaṭ*' or '*vaṣaṭ*' *or* '*vauṣaṭ*' at the beginning of a mantra. These are pronounced instead of the prescribed Vedic mantras like '*śanno devīrabhiṣṭaye*' etc. The *piṇḍa* or the rice cake offered to the *preta* and *pitaras* is cut but not separated into different portions, the mantra while preparing *the piṇḍa* being '*Om juṁ saḥ piṇḍaṁ*'. With mantras the *Shivakarmis* seek to purify not only the mind and body but also the 36 categories that constitute the manifested world. They believe that even after life departs one subtle '*prāṇa*' is still left in the body and a *Shivakarmi* Brahman makes a symbolic *jñana khaḍga* ('sword of knowledge') with 36 blades of *dharbha* grass to strike in the end at the head of the deceased and to free him or her from all the Karmic bonds.

Several features of the *Shivakarma* last rites have been incorporated in the mainstream Kashmiri Hindu funerary rituals also. These include the worship of the *śibikā* or the bier, the inscription of the Gāyatrī mantra in reverse on the shroud and the drawing of the *māyājāla* or *cittāvāsa* on which the pyre is laid. The *antyeṣṭi*

karma begins with the drawing of the *kalaśa* with rice-flour, the *astra kalaśa* to its right, the *gāyatrī kalaśa* to the left of the *astra kalaśa*, the *bhairava kalaśa* in the middle and the *bhūta-pañcaka bhairava- ṣaṣṭha* to its right for the rituals before cremation.

The ground is cleansed by sprinkling water mixed with sesame seeds etc., uttering the mantra, *"Om hrīṁ-huṁ prasphura-prasphura-sphura- sphura ghora-ghoratara ugrarūpa caṭa-caṭa pracaṭa-pracaṭa kaha-kaha vama-vama ghaṭaya-ghaṭaya arhuṁ-arhuṁ-arha phaṭ-phaṭ-phaṭ aghorāstrāya namaḥ."*[23] The *āsana* or the seat for the guru is drawn with vermilion and rice-flour and three eight-petalled lotuses are drawn in the Ishāna (north-east) quarter. *Argha* is held in hand in the '*tārjanya-anguṣṭha-yogātma-nārāca-mudrā*' or the 'index finger-thumb-*yogātma*-arrow posture' and strewn there, after which the sesame seeds are thrown to ward off evil spirits. Then the '*digbandhana*' or the ritual of fettering or closing the quarters to prevent insidious elements from doing any harm is performed. With the mystic syllable '*saṁ*' the *manḍala* of the moon is drawn with the left hand and the five manifestations of Shiva are worshipped from the left to right uttering the seed syllables '*yaṁ*' in the middle for Tatpapuruṣa, '*kṣaṁ*' in the north for *Īśāna*, '*raṁ*' in the west for Aghora, '*vaṁ*' in the south for Vāmadeva and '*laṁ*' in the east for Sadyojāta. With the right hand the *manḍala* or circle symbolic of the sun is drawn and meditating on the sun, the five faces or forms of Shiva are worshipped with the seed syllables, '*laṁ*' *vaṁ*', '*raṁ*', '*kṣaṁ*' and '*yaṁ*' for the Sadjoyata, Vāṁadeva, Aghora, Īśana and Tatpurṣa respectively.[24] Nine squares with eight-petalled lotuses inside are drawn for cleansing the spot with the *pañcagavya* or five products of the cow. After this *jñana khaḍga* or 'the sword of knowledge' is made from 36 blades of the *darbha* grass and worshipped with the mantras '*hah-phaṭ*' *ṣaṭatriṁśa rūpāya jñāna-khaḍga-rūpine-upyamāya namaḥ*' and it is requested to destroy all the evil persons and the opposing mantras of others: *"Om khaḍga tīkṣaṇa cchinda-cchinda vidāraya-vidāraya paramantrān grasa-grasa bhañjaya-bhañjaya trāsaya-trāsaya huṁ phaṭ-phaṭ cakrāya namaḥ śankhāya namaḥ saśarāya namaḥ kaumudāya namaḥ mahābalāya namaḥ."*[25] The various *ayudhas* or weapons and things held by the deities in their hands are also worshipped. The *śakti kalaśa* is worshipped and its water is poured over the left shoulder. The various manifestations of Shakti or the Mother Goddesses – Vāmā, Jyeshṭhā, Raudrī, Kālī,

Kālavikariṇī Balavikariṇī, Balapramathinī, Sarvabhūtadamanī, and Manomanī are also worshipped with the Mālinī mantra. The planets Sūrya, Candra, Angāraka, Budha, Bṛhaspati, Śukra, Śaniścara, Rāhu and Ketu (Sun, Moon, Mars, Mercury, Venus and Saturn, as well as Rahu and Ketu) are worshipped and so are the Nāgas Ananta, Vāsuki, Padma, Mahāpadma, Takṣaka, Kārkoṭa, Śankhapāla, Kulika. Shiva is hymned as *"sakala kalā vimiśraḥ sadasat sarveśa"*[26] ('the embodiment of all arts and the Lord of Truth and Untruth) with the mantra '*Om juṁ saḥ haṁsah mama pālaya - pālaya sohaṁ saḥ / juṁ Om*' . He is prayed for protection. Obeisance is made to him as the soul of everyone: *"Om Śivātmkaṁ-idaṁ-sarvaṁ Śivadeva pravarte"* and a sectarian variation of the Gāyatrī mantra is recited mentioning his various names. The deities of *Śivakalaśa, Śaktikalaśa* and *Astrakalaśa* are worshipped with the uttering of various seed syllables.

The dead body is taken to the cremation ground after worshipping the bier. *Pādya, arghya, gandha, dhūpa* and *dīpa* are offered to the dead body, which is regarded as Shiva. Water is poured on the bier with the mantra '*phaṭ prokṣaṇam karomi phaṭ*'. Three *piṇḍas* or rice balls are offered to the deceased – the Bauddha *piṇḍa,* Makaradhavaja *piṇḍa* and Yamarāja *piṇḍa;* the first while going to the cremation ground, the second halfway to it and the third on the cremation ground. Yama *sūktas* or hymns to Yama, the god of Death, are recited when the funeral procession is on its way to the crematorium. Inside the crematorium, the Śmashāna Bhairava is meditated upon and a *muṇḍa yāga* is performed with nine squares each except the middle one having an eight-petalled lotus and a triangle with a dot in the centre drawn with vermilion. On top, outside the squares, three lotuses are drawn for placing the *astra Kalaśa, Bhairava Kalaśa* and *Śakti Kalaśa.* The *agnikuṇḍa* is set up in the south-eastern quarter, the *māyājāla* is made in the south-western, and the pyre, four hands long and two hands wide, in the north-western quarter. The middle *kalaśa* is to represent the Bhairava with his five faces who is to be worshipped with Māyādevī in the Tantric mode. The deities of the *muṇḍa yāga* the eight Bhairavas: Samhāra Bhairava. Bhīṣana Bhairava, Kapāleśa Bhairava, Unmatta Bhairava, Krodharāja Bhairava, Canḍa, Bhairava, Ruru Bhairava and Asitānga Bhairava, the eight mother-goddesses Mahālakṣmi, Cāmunḍā, Vārāhī, Aindrī Vaiṣṇavī, Kumārī Maheśvarī and Brāhmī are invoked with Māyadevī and Bahurūpa Bhairva and worshipped. They are offered *pādya* (water for washing feet).

arghya (rice-grains), *gandha* (fragrances), *dhūpa* (incense). *puṣpa* (flowers), *dīpa* (lamp) etc. uttering the mystic syllables '*phaṭ astrāya phaṭ*' and concluding the *pūjā* with *svadhā* (adoration).[27]

The goddess Māyādevī is also referred to as '*ṭhah-ṭhah-ṭhah dravya svarūpiṇī*' and is worshipped in her different manifestations with name. The hymn recited to please her describes her as one who resides in all the gods because of being all-pervading. Seed mantras of the deities are uttered after *nyāsa* or mental assignment of various parts of the body to them. The offerings of scents, flowers, incense, lamp and food etc. are mainly made metaphorically along with recitations of the mantras and the seed syllables. They are meant to propitiate the deities who include those who are particularly worshipped in Kashmir, like the typical Kashmiri goddesses Śārikā, Rāgñyā, Jwālā, Śāradā, Tripurasundarī, Vitastā, Svacchanda Bhairava and the other Bhairavas and the goddesses mentioned above. While performing the rituals, the *gotra* of the deceased is mentioned as Bhairava or Rudra *gotra* for men and women both ('*pitra Bhairava gotrāya Rudrāya / mātra Bhairavagotrāyai Raudrānyai*') and the purpose of the rituals is stated to be the attainment of Shivahood by the departed soul: *"pitubhairva - anteṣṭikā - Śiva padavī prāptyārthaṁ"*.[28]

Nyāsa, on the dead body is done in reverse after bathing it and applying *tilaka* on its forehead, starting from the feet and reaching the *dvādaśānta* with the mantra: *"Om namaḥ pādayoḥ, ya namaḥ jānvoḥ, va namaḥ guhye, la namaḥ nābhau, ma hṛdi, kṣa tāluni, ra bhrūmadhye, sa brahmarandhre, ha namaḥ dvādashānte."*[29] ["Om salutations to the feet, *ya* salutations to the knees: *va,* salutations to the secret parts: *la,* salutations to the navel: *ma*, salutations to the heart; *kṣa,* salutations to the palate, *ra*, salutations the *dvādaśānta"*]. Mantras for appeasing the *ishṭadevī,* goddess Annapūrnā, the guru and all the yoginis also form part of the ritual.

Māyājāla is drawn on the ground depicting the *saptāvaraṇas* or seven covers with circles with the *bīja*-mantras or seed syllables of the deities Āmardaka, Kankāla, Bhīmaravāṭṭahāska, Karavīra, Karaṅka, Kālagrāsa and Kuleśvara. The *ratnadīpa* is placed inside the central circle and outside the last circle the eight *kṣetrapālas* or guardians of the quarters are worshipped. Above their seats, a pot full of water and other ingredients represent Māyādevî whose form is meditated upon and worshipped. The dead body is taken near the *māyājala*. A triangular or

rectangular *agnikuṇḍa* is made and lit with the fire brought in a pot, uttering *"ahaṁ eva Bhairava!"* ("I alone am Bhairava"). Water is sprinkled around the *agnikuṇḍa* and the fire is worshipped as '*jwālā linga*' or 'a *linga* of flames'. A very interesting feature that follows is that the *saṁskāras, garbhādāna, puṁsavana, simantonnayana, jātakarma sūtakaśuddhi* and *nāmakarṇa* are mentally performed by offering oblations into the fire. With the mantra '*Om juṁsaḥ Bhairavāgnaye namaḥ*', the sacred fire is worshipped after salutation to the Agnibhairava, Vagīshvarī or the Goddess of Speech is worshiped along with him. The *sruka* and the *sruva* (ladles for pouring clarified butter in a *yajña*) are touched with the upper part, middle part and base of the *jñāna khaḍga* ('the sword of knowledge'). The two ladles are then inverted and worshipped as Shiva and Shakti. After this ritual, the *ulmūkas* or firebrands are lighted and thrown on the pyre to light it with the mantra '*phaṭ agnikarma karomi phaṭ*', Two blades of *darbha* grass are put in the pot of clarified butter and divided into three parts which are imagined to be the three *nāḍis* (channels in the spinal cord) and worshiped with fragrance etc. and uttering the mantras, '*Om huṁ jñāna śaktaye namaḥ / Om juṁ pingalāyai namaḥ* on the right; *"Om hrîṁ kriyā śaktaye namaḥ*' on the left; *"Om haṁ suṣumnāyai namaḥ*'[30] It must be noted that *jñāna shakti* (power of knowledge), *kriyā shakti* (power of action) and *ichhā shakti* (power of will) are regarded as the three *shaktis* of Shiva in Kashmir Shaivism.

'*Naraka śuddhi*' or purification of the various hells with mantras and oblations into the fire follows the ritual *ājy homa* or the *homa* in which oblations of clarified better are offered to the deities. This is one of the uniquely important features of the *Shivakarma* funerary rites. The performer of the rites 'strikes' the *jñāna khaḍga* at the head of the dead body with the mystic syllables '*haṁ hiṁ-huṁ-haiṁ- hauṁ-ha*' and worships it with flowers from feet to head from a distance of four fingers to liberate it from the bonds of ignorance. All the thirty-six *tattvas* or categories of which the phenomenal world is constituted according to the Kashmiri Shaiva philosophy are then purified through purification rituals which include *nyāsa* and recitation of *Mālinī* and *Mātṛkā* mantras. The Kashmiri Shavites, it may be noted, identify divine consciousness with the Supreme Word or *parāvāk,* which can be described as phonematic creative energy represented by every letter of the alphabet. The component letters of a mantra, according to Shaiva analysis, is centred round

two ways of arranging the Sanskrit alphabet – *Mātṛkā* and *Mālinī*. In *Mātṛkā* the phonemes are arranged in the regular order with the vowels coming first and consonants next in serial order. The mantra of the *Mātṛkā* order is '*akṣahrīṁ*', that is it is from '*a*' to '*kṣa*', while the mantra of the *Mālinī* order begins with '*na*' and ends with '*pha*' and is known as '*nāphaḥīṁ*'. Both these mantras are repeated after performance of *nyāsa* and meditation on the five deities or live faces of Shiva (Svachandanātha) – Īśāna, Tatpuruṣa, Aghora, Vāmadeva and Sadyojāta.

Cittāvāsa or *cittāvastu,* a geometric design of the shape of a web or net is drawn at the head of the pyre and its deities are worshipped before the cremation takes place. These deities are Īśāna, Aghora, Bahurūpa, Tryambaka, Rudra, Śiva, Kapāleśa, Śikhivāhana, Krodharāja, Vikrāla, Rajotkaṭa, Canḍanetra, Raudravaktra, Canḍogra, Mahacanḍa, Sitavaktra, Siṁhanāda and Ugrasena. According to the '*Shiva-nirvāna-vidhi*', they are worshipped in different directions. According to the Vedic system the deities are Indra, Yama, Āpampati, Soma, Charki, Vidari. Paparakṣa, Śanḍa, Arymana, Jambaka and Pilipiccha.[31] A *homa* is performed with the *sruva,* offering oblations in the '*Shivāgni*' – 108 or 10 to Brahma, 10 to Vishnu, 10 to Rudra; 10 to Ishvara, 10 to Sadashiva, 10 to Mahabhutas. Oblations are then offered to the '*muṅḍa yāga*' deities uttering the seed-syllables (*bīja mantras*). Oblations are made with the *sruva* for burning the karmic bonds of the departed soul, freeing him / her from *māyāpaśa* or the fetters of *māyā* and from *āṇavapāśa:* "*amukasyātmanaḥ karmapāśaṁ dahami phaṭ svāhā phaṭ / amukasyātmanaḥ māyīya pāśaṁ amukasyātmanaḥ āṇavpaśaṁ dahami / phaṭ - svāhā - phaṭ*". Thereafter oblations are made into the fire for the *kṣetreśas* or guardians of the quarters.[32]

There are several esoteric rituals also which are performed in the Shaiva way but are difficult to understand. For instance, the one in which the outgoing breath from the performer's right nostril is made to pass through the left nostril of the corpse and into the channel leading to its heart with mantras. The whispering of '*vyomeśvarī vidyā*' into the right ear of the corpse is another such act. Mere utterance of the '*vidyā*', it is believed, makes even Shiva himself tremble – "*yasya uccāraṇa matreṇa kampate sau svayaṁ Śivaḥ*".[33]

Then propitiatory offerings of "grains, meat, milk, fish, curds, clarified butter, rice-gruel and honey" are made to the presiding deities of the funerary rituals. This is known as the *aṣṭāṅga bali* (eight-fold sacrifice) and is made with the prayer that

"the departed soul may attain '*Śivaloka*' eternally and the performers may obtain longevity, health and happiness. The pyre is lighted with three *ulmūkas* after 108 oblations to Bahrupabhairava with the mantra *"hasa - rakṣa - mala - vāya Om Bahurūpāya svāhā*' and 108 to Māyādevi with the mantra *"hrīṁ Māyādevyai svāhā*." Everything is then thrown into the burning pyre – the *sruka* and *sruva* towards the nostrils, *jñāna – khaḍga* towards the head, the *ājya – pātra* (pot filled with clarified butter) towards the belly of the corpse and the rest in between and so on. The performer sprinkles water from the water – pot around the pyre and after going three times around it, breaks the pot on the head of the axe near the head of the dead body, loudly uttering the name of the departed soul and the appropriate mantra. The funeral rites at the crematorium conclude with the recitation of the mantras '*bahurūpāyā namaḥ*' and "*Om hrīṁ Māyādevyai vouṣaṭ namaḥ*" 108 times each. The image of Śmaśāna Bhairava is meditated upon in the end.

The Shivakarmis perform the tenth, eleventh and twelfth day rituals also according to their own procedure. These rituals are also long, though not as long and complicated as their cremation rites. The same deities are worshipped with the recitation of similar mantras and *bīja-mantras*. The deceased person is regarded as belonging to Shiva–*gotra* with '*pitre Śivagotrāya Rudrāya*' being uttered in case he happens to be the performer's father and '*mātre Śivagotrāyai Rudrāṇyai*[34] in case she is the performer's mother. Here also the mystic syllable '*juṁ saḥ*' is added to Om before the related mantras. The rest of the ceremonies are not much different from the Vedic way of performing the post-funerary rituals.

Other Post-funerary Rites

The Kashmiri Hindus also perform the fortnightly, monthly, six-monthly and yearly *śrāddhas* (*pachhavār, māsavār, shaḍmos, vahravahar*) much in the same way as other Hindus do. *Śrāddhas* are also performed at places of pilgrimage like Mattan, Gangabal etc. The funerary and post-funerary rites for a child are performed at the Kapālamochana Tirtha at Shopiyan. There is a particular kind of *śrāddha* at which oil is supposed to be offered to the deceased spirit by pouring into earthen lamps. This is known as the '*tīla śrāddh*' in Kashmiri and is performed after six months but before one year of a kin's death. *Kambari Pachh* or the *Śrāddha Pakṣa* is devoted to the performance of *śrāddhas* of the departed spirits. Laugākshi has

mentioned several other kinds of *śrāddhas* including the *aṣṭakas* or oblations offered to the manes on the eighth day after full moon, especially in the months of winter, and has given their procedure.

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CHAPTER 7

Daily Rites and other Rituals

From dawn to dusk a Kashmir Hindu's day was punctuated by a number of rituals which he performed for his physical, mental and spiritual well-being according to the ordainments of the sacred texts. Though exigencies of modern life have greatly changed things for him, and the circumstances created by the disturbed conditions in Kashmir have pushed him into a tragic predicament, the memory of these daily rites has not altogether faded from his mind. And even in the present situation, there are some people in his community who still perform a few of these rites even though their number may be quite small. To have a look at the daily rituals of the Kashmiri Hindus would, therefore, be quite an interesting and worthwhile exercise. We shall describe some of these in the passing while some like the *Sandhyā* and *Tarpaṇa* in detail. As Kashmiris belong to the Kāṭhaka reduction of the Black Yajurveda, the rules and procedures for the ritual system they follow have, for the most part, been laid out by Laugākashi.

Daily Practices

As a Kashmiri Pandit wakes up from sleep, the first thing he is required to do before he leaves his bed is to think of his Guru and pay homage to him and God in the form of his *Iṣṭadeva* or *Iṣṭadevī* (personal deity), contemplating on his connection with the world he lives in. After getting up he is to place his right foot on the earth and go for performing his morning ablutions. He is then to go for taking his morning bath which some decades back used to be done at the river by the more religious – minded. Cleaning his teeth, he would wash his hands first and

then his feet – the left foot first. Invoking the presence of sacred waters of all the places of pilgrimage, he would wash his face uttering *"Gaṅgā-prayāga-naimiṣa-puṣkarā ādi tirthāni yāni bhuvi santi Hariprasādāt / āyatu tāni karapadmapuṭe madīye prakṣālayantu vadanasya niṣkalaṅkaṁ"*. Then he would wash his sacred thread reciting the Gāyatrī Mantra, and purify himself by rinsing his mouth with water (*ācamana*). He would perform the *praṇāyāma* for controlling his breath with the recitation of the formula '*Om bhūḥ Om bhuvaḥ Om svaḥ Om mahaḥ Om janaḥ Om tapaḥ Om satyaṁ*'. This was followed by *namaskāra* to the Supreme Being and homage to Varuṇa and Sūrya, after which he would rub his body (with mud in earlier times as ordained in the sacred texts or with soap) reciting the mantras prescribed for different parts of the body. Thereafter he would offer handfuls of water to the gods, wearing his sacred thread over the left shoulder and uttering '*Om namaḥ devebhyaḥ*': to the *ṛṣis* wearing the sacred thread round his neck and uttering '*svāhā ṛṣibhyaḥ*', to ancestors, wearing the sacred thread over the right shoulder and uttering '*svadhā pitṛbhyaḥ*'. Then wearing the sacred thread again over his left shoulder he recited "*ābrahmastambha paryantaṁ brahmāṇḍaṁ sacarācaraṁ jagat tṛpyatu tṛpyatu tṛpyatu evamastu*" ("May the whole animate and inanimate universe from Brahma down to the smallest tuft of grass be satisfied").[2] After that he would apply the *tilaka* on his forehead and put on his clothes to start his day's work. All these acts were performed accompanied by reciting of different Vedic verses.

THE *SANDHYĀ*

The most important and most sacred of the morning rites for a Kashmiri Hindu is the *Sandhyā* which, as the very word suggests, is performed at the time of union between the night and day, that is, the morning and evening twilight. It is also performed at the time of union between the forenoon and afternoon, that is, the mid-day. Though a kind of prayer, *Sandhyā* is more meditative than petitionary in its features, as the suffix '*dhyā.*' of the word suggests. The focal point of *Sandhyā* is the Gāyatrī mantra or rather the Sāvitrī mantra, Gāyatrī actually being the metre in which the mantra is composed. The twilight meditations of *Sandhyā*, however, consist of several parts, beginning with *namaskāra* or salutation and including *prāṇāyāma, ācamana, upasthāna, tarpaṇa, nyāsa, dhyāna, vyahṛti* and the Gāyatrī

mantra, all arranged in a definite order.

(1) *Namaskāra*

Sandhyā begins with *namaskāara* or salutation to Mahāgāyatrī, Sāvitrī and Saraswatī: *"Om Śrīmahāgāyatrai namaḥ Sāvitrai namaḥ Saraswatyai namaḥ"* For *praṇava* or the sacred syllable Om, the *ṛṣi* or seer is mentioned as Brahmā himself, the metre Gāyatrī and the deity God in the form of Agni, for the *vyāhṛtīs* the seer is the sage Prajāpati and the *devatās* or deities are Agni, Vāyu and Sūrya; for the Gāyatrī mantra, the revealer is sage Viśvāmitra, the divinities are God in the aspect of Agni, Vāyu, Sūrya, Bṛhaspati, Soma, Indra, and Viśvedeva, the All-gods. Gāyatrī is invoked as '*sarvapāpa pranāśinī*' or 'destroyer of all sins'. No *japa* is considered greater than Gāyatrī, no offering greater than the *vyāhṛti*. The mantra for invoking Gāyatrī for the purpose of *prāṇāyāma* is: *"Om āgaccha varade devī japye me sannidhau bhava / gāyantaṁ trāyase yasmad Gāyatrī tvaṁ tataḥ smṛtaḥ"* ("Om, come O boon-giving goddess and be present in my proximity. Since you protect (*trāyase*) by being sung (*gāyantaṁ*), therefore you are called Gāyatrī.")[3] Invoking Gāyatrī in this manner, the deity is praised thus: *"Ojo asi balaṁ asi bhrajo asi devatānāṁ dhāma asi viśvaṁ asi viśvāyuḥ saravaḥ asi sarvāyurābhibhū"*, ("Thou art energy. Thou art conquering might (patience). Thou art strength. Thou art brilliance, Thou art the abode of Devas (*svarga*), Thou art named (such as Indra etc.), Thou art All (inanimate creation), thou art All life (animate creation), Thou art All, Thou art All living beings, Thou art conquering might."]

(2) *Prāṇāyāma*

Prāṇāyāma or the exercise to regulate breath by in-drawing, retaining and exhaling the air is performed with the recitation of the Gāyatrī mantra and its *mahāvyāhṛtīs* and *vyāhṛtīs*. The *mahāyāhṛtis* or the 'great exclamations' are:

Mahāvyahṛtīs*: *Om bhūḥ, bhuvaḥ, svaḥ.

The *mahāvyāhṛtis* are chanted before the Gāyatrī mantra proper. The mantra consists of the following sacred syllables:

Gāyatrī: '*Tat savituḥ-vareṇyaṁ bhargo devasya dhīmahi dhiyo yo naḥ pracodayāt*'.

Vyāhṛtīs: 'Om bhūḥ, Om bhuvaḥ, Om svaḥ, Om mahaḥ, Om janaḥ, Om tapaḥ, Om satyaṁ.'

We shall discuss the meaning of the full mantra later. The meaning of the main Gāyatrī mantra is as follows:

> 'Let us meditate on the adorable light of the creator (sun); may he stimulate our intellect.'

(3) *Śiras*

After the *pūraka* part of the *prāṇāyāma* or drawing of the breath is performed, with the hand full of water and meditating on God, the Creator, the *śiras* or the concluding mantra is recited:

> Śiras:- *'Om āpo jyotiraso' mṛtam brahma, bhūr bhuva svaḥ Om'*
>
> ['The ineffable God is All-pervading (Āpah), is All-light, is all-Essence (Rasa) and is Deathless (Amṛtam), and is Brahman. The Full, is Pure Being knowledge and Bliss; Om.']

(4) *Ācamana* or Symbolic Sipping of Water

After completing the entire process of *prāṇāyāma* with the performance of *kuṁbhaka* (retaining the breath) and *recacka* (exhaling the air), the *ācamana* is performed thrice for the morning Sandhyā with the following mantra:

> *'Om sūryaśca mā manyuśca manyupatayaśca manyukṛtebhyaḥ / pāpebhyo rakṣantaṁ / yad rātryā pāpakarmarśaṁ mansā vācā hastābhyāṁ pādaṁ udareṇa śiśna / rātristad āvalumptu yatkiñcit dūritaṁ mayidaṁ ahaṁ āpo amṛta yonau sūrye jyotiṣi uhomi svāhā'.*
>
> ["May Sūrya, and Manyu, and Manyupatis (the masters of Manyu) protect me from the sins caused by (my) *manyu* (my wrathful spirit). Whatever sin I may have committed in the night – by mind, speech or hands or feet or stomach or (the male generating) organ, may Night destroy that whatever sin there may be in me, and myself also, all that I offer in the immortal cause – Sūrya, the self-luminous God. *Svāhā*."]

The *acamana* mantra for the evening *Sandhyā* is the same, with the words

'*sūrya*' to be replaced by '*agni*', '*rātryā*', by '*ahna*', and '*sūrya*' by '*satya*'.

For the mid-day *Sandhyā* there is a different mantra, which is as follows:

"Om āpaḥ punantu pṛthvīṁ pṛthvī pūtā punātu māṁ / punantu Brahmaṇaspatirbrahma pūta punātu mām // yat-ucchiṣṭaṁ abhojyaṁ yadvā duścaritaṁ mama / sarvaṁ punantu māmāpo asataṁ ca pratigrahaṁ svāhā //"

["May the Āpas purify the earth, and the earth being purified, purify me. May the waters purify the Brahmanaspati, and the self-purified Brahma (the Vedas) purify me. May the waters purity all sins, such as, eating the remains of another's or improper food, or evil conduct, or accepting gifts from sinners, Svāhā"] (Trs. Srisa Chander Vasu)

In the evening and mid-day *Sandhyā* too the *ācamana* is to be performed three times. This *ācamana,* says Srisa Chander Vasu, is to be distinguished from the ordinary *ācamana* or sipping of water, and may be called *mantra ācamana.* Writes Vasu: "As Snāna, or bathing, purifies the physical body, and Prāṇāyāma, or breathing exercise purifies the emotional, or the animal body, so this Mantra – Achamana purifies the mental body."[4] In a way it is a purifactory ceremony to wash away sins and wrong doings and is, therefore, in the form of a prayer to Sūrya or Agni. The Manyu mentioned in the mantra for the morning and evening Sandhyās, it may be noted, is identified with the wrathful aspect of God who is entreated to forgive sins "of omission and commission".

The *mantra ācamana,* is, therefore, a means to wash away the impurities of mind, sipping of water being on outward symbol of purification. The Sun and Agni are regarded as the great purifiers.

(5) *Mārjana*

Mārjana is the next step in the performance of Sandhyā, the word literaly meaning wiping away, cleaning or purifying. It is thus another symbolic act of purification of the body and the mind and consists of sprinkling of water on different parts of the body with the recitation of Vedic mantras. The Kashmiri Hindus recite several mantras taken from the Ṛgveda and Atharvaveda mostly, in which prayers are addressed to God in His aspect of Āpas or the all-pervading waters:

Om āpo hiṣtha mayobhuvastān ūrje dadhātana / mahe raṇāya cakṣaṣe //

Yo vaḥ śivātamo rasaḥ tasya bhājayateha naḥ / uś'ātiriva mātaraḥ // Tasmā - arangamāma vaḥ yasya kṣyaya jinvatha /āpo janāyathaḥ ca naḥ // (Ṛg. x 9.1 to 3 Atharva 5.1)

["O ye Āpas! Since you are the sources of pleasure support us, (therefore), by giving us food, (and nourish us by giving us) great and delightful desired objects (or by teaching us the adorable sounds through which we may find the ineffable this of God-vision).

"Nourish us here with the essence of yours which is the most auspicious, as the well-wishing mothers nourish their children with the milk of their breast.

"O waters! We approach ye all for our sins to be destroyed, give us strength to cope with sin".] (Trs: S.C. Vasu)

(6) *Upasthāna*

After *mārjana* is performed the *sūrya-upasthāna* marked by chanting of Vedic mantras. The word *upasthāna* means 'approaching' or 'going near' and in this ceremony three handfuls of water consecrated by the Gāyatrī mantra are offered to the sun and Vedic verses uttered in praise of the deity. Some of these verses are given below:

Om udvayaṁ tamasas pari svah paśyanta uttaraṁ /
devaṁ devatra sūryamagnaṁ jyotiruttamaṁ //

['Om. We have gone out of the encircling darkness, and have seen the high heaven, and the Divine Sun full of great light in the sky'.]

Om udutyaṁ jātavedasaṁ devaṁ vahanti ketavaḥ / dṛśe viśvasya sūryaṁ //
(Ṛg Veda I. 50. 1)

['Om. His heralds (rays of the sun) bear him up aloft, the god who knoweth all that lives; Sūrya that all may look on Him'.] (Trs. Griffith)

Om citraṁ devānāmudagādanîkaṁ cakṣur Mitrasya Varuṇasya' gneḥ /
āprā dyāvā pṛthivī antarikṣaṁ / Sūrya ātma jagatasthuṣaś ca svāhā //
(Ṛg Veda I. 115.1)

['The brilliant presence of the gods hath risen, the eyes of Mitra, Varuna and Agni. The soul of all that moveth not or moveth, the sun hath filled

the air, earth and heaven'.] (Trs. Griffith)

Om taccakṣur devahitaṁ purastac cchukraṁ uccharat / paśyema śaradaḥ śataṁ prabravāma śaradaḥ śataṁ/ adīnaḥ syāma śaradaḥ śataṁ bhūyaśca śaradaḥ śatāt//

["That Eye (of the universe), the beloved of the gods, the brilliant (sun) arises in the east. May we see for a hundred autumns, hear for a hundred autumns, speak for a hundred autumns, be rich for a hundred autumns – hear, more than hundred autumns."][5]

Many more verses are recited in praise of the Sun with hands upraised and standing on tiptoes. Then *dhyāna* of Vishnu is performed reciting the famous 'Puruṣa Sūkta'. Shiva is also meditated upon, for which the '*saṁhāra mudrā*' is performed and the famous Vedic prayer '*tanme manaḥ śiva saṅkalpam astu*' is recited.

(7) *Nyāsa*

After *Sūryopasthāna* various *nyāsas* are performed before Gāyatrī is invoked and meditated upon. In *nyāsa* various parts of the body are mentally consigned to the deities or a mantra. Here are some *nyāsas* in which, the Gāyatrī Mantra is consigned during Sandhyā performed by Kashmiri Hindus.

a nābham	'a'	on the navel
u hṛdi	'u'	on the heart
m śirasi	'm'	on the head

Om anguṣṭhābhyāṁ namaḥ	*Om* salutation to the two thumb fingers
bhuvaḥ tarjanībhyām namaḥ	*Bhuvaḥ,* salutation to the two index fingers
svaḥ madhyamābhyāṁ namaḥ	*Svaḥ,* salutation to the two middle fingers
mahaḥ anāmikābhyāṁ namaḥ	*Mahaḥ* salutation to the two ring fingers
Janaḥkanishṭhikābhyāṁ namaḥ	*Janaḥ,* saluation to the two little fingers
tapaḥ satyaṁ karatala kara-priṣṭhābhyāṁ namaḥ	*Tapaḥ* and *satyaṁ,* salutation to the palms and backs of the hands.
Om bhūḥ hṛdayāya. namaḥ	*Om Bhū,* saluation to the heart
Om bhuvaḥ śirase namaḥ	*Bhuvaḥ,* salutation to the head

Om svaḥ śikhāye vaṣaṭ	*Svaḥ, vaṣaṭ* to crown of the head
Om mahaḥ kavacāya huṁ	*Mahaḥ, huṁ* to the chest and neck
Om janaḥ netrābhyāṁ vauṣaṭ	*Janaḥ, vauṣaṭ* to the two eyes
Om tapaḥ satyaṁ astrāya phaṭ	*Astrāya phaṭ* to *Satyam*
tat savitur anguṣṭhābhyāṁ namaḥ	*Tat Savitur,* salutation to the two thumb fingers
vareṇyaṁ tarjanībhyāṁ namaḥ	*Vareṇyaṁ,* salutation to the two index fingers
bhargo devasya madhyamābhyāṁ namaḥ	*Bhargo devasya,* salutation to the two middle fingers
dhīmahī anāmikābhyāṁ namaḥ	*Dhīmahī,* salutation to the two ring fingers
pracodayāt karatala-kara priṣṭhābhyāṁ naṃaḥ	*Pracodayāt,* salutation, to the palms and the backs of the two hands
tat padayoḥ	'*Tat*' on the feet
savitur jānuvoh	'*Savitur*' on the knees
vareṇyam kaṭyaṁ	'*Varenyaṁ*' on the hip
bhargo nābhaṁ	'*Bhargo*' on the navel
devasya hṛdaye	'*Devastya*' in the heart
dhīmahī kaṇṭhe	'*Dhīmahī*' in the throat
dhiyo nasikāyāṁ	'*Dhiyo*' on the nose
yo cakṣuṣe	'*Yo*' in the eyes
naḥ lalāṭe	'*Naḥ*' on the forehead
pracodayāt śirase	'*Pracodayāt*' on the head
tat savitur hṛdyāya namaḥ	'*Tat savitur*' salutation to the heart
vareṇyam śirase svāhā	'*Varenyaṁ*' on the head, *svāhā*
bhargo devasya śikhāyai vaṣaṭ	'*Bhargo devasya*' on the crown of the head, '*vaṣaṭ*'
dhīmahī kavacāya huṁ	'*Dhīmahī*' on the chest and neck, '*huṁ*'
dhiyo yonaḥ netrābhyāṁ vauṣaṭ	'*Dhiyo yo naḥ*' in the eyes, '*vauṣaṭ*'
pracodayāt astrāya phaṭ	'*Astrāya phaṭ*' to be performed with striking the palm of the left hand with the index and middle fingers of the right hand as to make a slight sound.[6]

As will be noted, these are '*kara nyāsas*" and '*aṅganyāsas*' or impositions of the Gāyatrī mantra on the fingers and the palm and back of the hand and on various parts of the body. In performing '*kara nyāsa*' the two thumbs are touched with the index fingers, the index fingers with the thumbs, the middle fingers, ring fingers and the little fingers with the thumbs and the right hand is turned round the left while reciting the mantra. In case of '*aṅga nyāsa*', the different portions of the mantra are recited touching various parts of the body – the heart, the head, the crown or tuft with the right hand. The left hand is placed on the right shoulder and the right hand on the left shoulder crosswise. While uttering '*astrāya phaṭ*' the palm of the left hand is struck with the index and middle fingers of the right hand so as to make a sound. The syllable '*vaṣaṭ*' is derived from the √ *vah* meaning offering to gods and *vauṣaṭ* also carries the same connotation. The syllable '*phaṭ*' is derived from the root *sphuṭ* meaning 'to break'[7] and is pronounced for destructive acts such as removing serial obstacles, *aghamarṣana* etc.

(8) *Mudrā*

Mudrā or postures form an important feature of the Kashmiri Hindu Sandhyā rituals. Various *mudrās* are to be made after performing the *nyāsas* mentioned above. Some of these are the *sam, vitat, vistīrṇa, dvimukha, caturmukha, pañcamukha, ṣaṇmukha, adhomukha, vyāpakañjali, śākata, yama – pāśa, granthikā, sammukhonmukha, vilamba, muṣṭika, mīna, kūrma, varāha, siṁha-krānta, mahākrānta, mudgara* and *pallava*. These *mudrās* are performed with various syllables of the Gāyatrī mantra.

(9), (10) and (11) *Dhāyana*, Prayer and *Japa*

The Mahāgāyatrī is meditated upon thus: Her hands are in the boon and protection giving postures and she is holding a hook, a trident, a rope, a conch, a discus and two lotuses in her hands. Prayer is offered to her for "removing the misfortunes accumulated through hundreds of births" and she is invoked reciting the mantra:

> '*āgaccha varade devī tryakṣarā brahmavādinī / Gāyatrī chandasāṁ mātār brahmayone namo'stute//*[8]

["Om! Come thou, O boon – giving Goddess, consisting of three syllables, and the revealer of Brahman, Gāyatrī the mother of all metres. Salutation to thee, O source of Brahman."]

The deity is saluted and Gāyatrī mantra '*Om bhū bhuvaḥ svaḥ tat savitur vareṇyaṁ, bhargo devasya dhimahī / dhiyo yo naḥ praodayāt//*' is then recited silently 108 times. This silent incantation of the mantra, called *japa*, is regarded as the most important part of the Sandhyā: '*Gāyatrīṁ praṇavaṁ cānte japa evaṁ udahṛtaṁ*'. This is followed by performance of eight postures – *surabhi, jñāna, cakra, yoni, kūrma, paṅkaja, linga, niraṇāyaka.*[9]

(12) *Dik-namaskāra* - Salutation to the Quarters

Then, preparing to conclude the Sandhyā, the gods residing in all the quarters – east, west, north, south, zenith and the nadir are saluted. The Brahman (the Absolute Reality), Agni, Pṛthvī and the Lord of Medicinal Herbs are also saluted and so are Speech and Vācaspati, the Lord of Speech: '*Om namaḥ prācyai diśe yaśca devatā etasyāṁ prativasanti etabhayaśca vo namaḥ / namo' vantrāyai diśe yaśca devtā ... namaḥ / dakṣiṇāyai ... namaḥ / pratīcyani namo ... namaḥ / namo' vantrāyai diśe ... namaḥ udīcyai diśe ... namaḥ / urdhvāyai diśe ... namo vantrāyai diśe ... namo' adharāyai diśe yaśca devatā etasyām prativasanti etabhyaśca vo namaḥ // Om namo brahmaṇe namo astvāgnaye namaḥ pṛthivyai namaḥ auṣadhibhyaḥ / namo Vacaspataye namo Viṣṇave bṛhate kṛṇomi //*'[10]

(13) *Tarpaṇa*

Tarpaṇa or water oblations to the *devās* (gods), *ṛṣis* (sages) and *pitṛs* (ancestors) is a rite performed after taking a bath in a river. It is one of the essential daily practices for Hindus and is performed "while standing in water after the bath, taking the water in the palms of both hands together as a cup". The Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa ordains:

"Let the twice-born having bathed perform daily, in their due order, the offering of oblations to the Devas, Rishis and the Pitris."

(a) Deva Tarpaṇa

Regarded a part of the *snāna* or sacred bath, *tarpaṇa* is of two kinds – abbreviated one and the full *tarpaṇa.* The *devas* are invoked for the purpose and handfuls of water are offered to them, beginning with the great Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Rudra, and Prajāpati. The oblations are made with the sacred thread on the left shoulder and recitation of the following mantras:[11]

Oṁ Brahmā tṛpyatāṁ	Om, may Brahmā be satisfied
Oṁ Viṣnus tṛpyatāṁ	Om, may Viṣṇu be satisfied
Oṁ Rudras tṛpyatāṁ	Om, may Rudra be satified
Oṁ Prajāpatis tṛpyatāṁ	Om, may Prajāpati be satisfied
Āsuriḥ tṛpyatāṁ	May Āsuri be satisfied
Vodhaḥ tṛpyatāṁ	May Vodha be satisfied
Pañcaśikhaḥ tṛpyatāṁ	May Pañcaśikha be satisfied

Then turning to the east and with the sacred thread over the left shoulder the following mantras are uttered while offering water:[13]

Oṁ Marīciḥ tṛpyatāṁ	Om may Marīci be satisfied
Atriḥ tṛpyatāṁ	May Atri be satisfied
Angirāḥ tṛpyatāṁ	May Angirā be satisfied
Pulastyaḥ tṛpyatāṁ	May Pulastya be satisfied
Pulahaḥ tṛpyatāṁ	May Pulaha etc.
Kratuḥ tṛpyatāṁ	May Kratu etc.
Pracetaḥ tṛpyatāṁ	May Praceta etc.
Bhṛguḥ tṛpyatāṁ	May Bhṛgu etc.
Vasiṣṭhaḥ tṛpyatāṁ	May Vasiṣṭha etc.
Nāradaḥ tṛpyatāṁ	May Nārada etc.

(b) Libations to Pitṛs

Having offered water to *devas* and *ṛṣis,* the manes are invoked to come and accept the libations. With the sacred thread over the right shoulder, three handfuls of water are poured to satisfy first the divine manes:

Om agniśvāttaḥ svadhā - namas tṛpyantāṁ

Om may the Agniśvāttah *pitṛs* be satisfied. Salutations to them. *Savdhā*!

Om bahirṣadaḥ svadhā - namas tṛpyantāṁ

Om, may the Bahirṣada *pitṛs* be satisfied. Salutations to them. *Svadhā*!

Om, haviṣmantaḥ svadhā - namas tṛpyantāṁ

Om, May the Haviṣmanta *pitṛs* be satisfied. Salutations to them. *Svadhā*!

Om somapaḥ svadhā - namas tṛpyantāṁ

Om may the Somapa *pitṛs* be satisfied. Salutations to them. *Svadhā*!

Om sukālinaḥ svadhā - namas tṛpyantāṁ

Om may the Sukālina *piṭrs* be satisfied. Salutations to them. *Svadhā*!

Om ajyapaḥ svadhā - namas tṛpyantāṁ

Om may the Ajyapa *pitṛs* be satisfied. Salutations to them. *Svadhā*![14]

The paternal and maternal ancestors are then offered handfuls of water with *tila* (sesame seeds), three each to the grandfather, great – grandfather, great-great grandfather; mother, maternal grandfather, mother's great -grandfather and handfuls to other kinsfolk; making the exclamations: '*svadhā-namaḥ tṛpyantāṁ*' with each. Not only are all ancestors offered water but also creatures of water, earth, air etc. (with the sacred thread round the neck) – *"jalecara bhūnilaya vāyvadharāśca jantavāḥ"*.[15]

Three handfuls are poured to those suffering torments in hell:

> '*Om narakeṣu samasteṣu yātanāsu ca ye sthitaḥ /*
> *Teṣam āpyayanayaitad divate salilaṁ mayā //*
>
> ["Om. In hell's dark horrors, or in torments thrown. Where'er they may be, may water poured by me assuage their sufferings and their pains allay."][16]

Three handfuls are also offered to kinsmen and friends.

(c) *Tarpaṇa to all Jīvas*

Oblations of handfuls of water are then given to all other *jīvas* (creatures), including gods, *ācāryas* (spiritual teachers), Gandharvas, the Year and its. parts, goddesses, *apsarās*, attendants of gods, *nāgas*, the Sea, the Mountains, the Rivers,

the Human Beings, the Yakṣas, the Rakṣas, the Piśācas, those with beautiful-wings, the beasts, the Medicinal Herbs, Lord of the Plants, the four kinds of Elementary Matter, the Asuras, the Malignant Planets, the crooked and the creeping ones, the Vidyādharas (holders of knowledge,) the holders of water, those who walk in space, the creatures of the earth.

(d) Tarpaṇa to Yama

Three handfuls each of water are offered to the fourteen Yamas – Yama, Dharmarāja, Mṛtyu, Antaka, Vaivasvata, Kāla, Sarvaprāṇahara, Audumbara, Nīla, Dadhna, Parameṣṭhī, Vṛkodara, Bhīma, Citra and Citragupta.

(e) Ṛṣi Tarpaṇa

Turning to the north, with the sacred thread round the neck, two handfuls of water are given to each of the following sages with the following Mantras:[17]

Om Sanakaḥ tṛpyatāṁ	Om may Sanaka be satisfied
Sanandanaḥ tṛpyatāṁ	May Sanandana be satisfied
Sanātanaḥ tṛpyatāṁ	May Sanātana be satisfied
Sanatkumāraḥ tṛpyatāṁ	May Sanatkumāra be satisfied
Kapilaḥ tṛpyatāṁ	May Kapila be satisfied

(14) Salutation to Sūrya

The *Sandhyā* rituals conclude with salutation to Sūrya again. The Sun-god is praised as "the holder of Dharma and witness to good deeds by men". Homage is paid to him as *"pratyakṣa deva"* or 'the visible God', the physical sun being considered a symbol of the Supreme Being because of its effulgence and its role in sustaining life on the earth.

From what has been said above it can be gathered that the Kashmiri Hindu *Sandhyā* has elements from both the Rig Vedic and Yajurvedic *Sandhyā*. Not very many years ago it formed an important part of the daily ritual of the Kashmiri Hindus. Today there are hardly any people who perform it. This is largely because of the changes brought about by the modern way of living, it being no longer

possible for people rushing to go for their daily round of worldly duties to find time for such elaborate rites. And then nobody, at least in the cities, goes to the river now to have his bath. Things have further been complicated for the Kashmiri Hindus by their present dispersal. However, rituals such as *Sandhyā* have almost become a thing of the past in the rest of the country as well. People belonging to the younger generation have, in fact, become indifferent to religion and religious practices throughout the world.

Mealtime Rituals

What is true of the *Sandhyā* is true of the mealtime rituals also, even to a greater extent. Today they have been almost completely discarded, again largely because of modern life style replacing the traditional way of living. But they continued to be observed to some extent by quite a large section of the population, especially in the rural areas, through several decades of the 20th century. The method of eating food has been well laid down in the religious texts. It will not be altogether irrelevant, therefore, to have a brief look at them and to see how the more traditional among Kashmiri Hindus followed it as part of their mid-day religious duties. Sitting on the floor, generally facing the east, one taking his meals would make a square (*catuṣkoṇa*) on the floor and put the dish of food on this square. Usually the square was smeared with mud and was called '*dâj*' in Kashmiri. A sheet of white cloth spread on the floor or a squarish stool (*chaukī*) would also do. Food was generally served in bronze *thālīs* and before partaking it one had to wash his/her hands, feet and face. Then the dish that was placed before one was touched with hand and salutation was made to the food served saying:

> *"annapate annasya no dehi annamivasya śuṣminaḥ / pradatāraṁ tariśaṁ ūrjaṁ no dehi dvipade śam catuṣpade//"*[17]
>
> ['O Lord of Food, give us the food that will make us strong and healthy. O Giver of Food, may the food served to us give us energy; may it satisfy the bipeds and the quadrupeds'].

With this mantra a little water was sprinkled on the food and three portions of it were kept apart on the right side for animals and birds. The pellet of rice meant for the dog was called *"hūny myâṭ"* Food was then taken with salutations to the ruler, to the Lord of the earth and God, reciting the following mantra:

'Om bhūpataye namaḥ / Om bhuvanapataye namaḥ / Om bhūtapataye namaḥ//.[18]

['Om salutation to the Lord of the earth; salutation to the Lord of the universe; salutation to the Lord of beings.']

Then sipping a little water the following mantras were recited:

'āpo-jyoti-raso' mṛtaṁ brahma bhūr bhuvaḥ svaḥ Om'.

['The ineffable God is all-pervading (water), is all light, all essence, and is immortal, and is Brahma.']

'B*rahmārpaṇaṁ brahma-havir - brahmāgnau brahmana hutaṁ."*

['This food is offering to Brahma, is an oblation into Brahmāgni (Sacred Fire) for Brahma to partake of']

'Om amṛtopastarāṇaṁ asi svāhā'.

['Om, O Water! thou art indestructible covering of *prāṇa* (vital airs).'][19]

These are known as the *gaṇḍūṣa* mantras. With these five morsels were put into the mouth as an offering to the internal fire. The following mantra was then recited:

Om prāṇāya svāha / Om apānāya svāhā. / Om samānāya svāhā / Om udānāya svāhā/ Om vyānāya svāhā //.

Prāṇa, Apāna, Samāna, Udāna and *Vyāna* are the five vital breaths or life currents. These five vital airs are supposed to regulate the functions of the body, hence this can be construed as an internal *homa*. Food was then eaten silently and finished with sipping a little water (*acamana*). After performing the *acamana,* water was poured with the thumb of the right hand on the big toe of the right foot with the mantra '*anguṣṭha mātraḥ puruṣaḥ so 'nguṣṭhāgraṁ-upāśritaṁ*'.[20]

Then verses praising *Vaiśvānara* or the internal digestive fire and food were recited. Last of all God was prayed for welfare of all living creatures of the world:

'*ātankahīnaṁ jagadastu sarvaṁ doṣaṁ pranāśaṁ sakalaḥ prayantu*'.[21]

['May the whole world be free of terror. May all sinfulness disappear.']

This method of eating food was common to all Hindus with slight modifications here and there. It has been almost completely discarded now, but the spirit behind

it still lives on. Even today a Kashmiri Hindu does not forget to set apart a portion of his food for the animals and birds. The habit of leaving '*hūny myâṭ,*' a rice pellet for the dogs, has not been completely given up by him.

Laying Foundation of a New House

Having described the daily practices of Kashmiri Hindus like the Sandhyā, let us have a look at some once in a life-time rituals like those related to the foundation-laying ceremony of a new house and the ceremony of entering a new house. Known as *śaṅku-pratiṣṭhā* and *gṛha-praveśa* in Sanskrit and *kún-dyun* and *prävish* in Kashmiri, both these ceremonies are an essential part of the socio-religious life of the community – no one ever thinks of building a new house or entering a new one without them. Both have been described in the Gṛhyasūtras of Laugākshi under the titles '*vāstu - nirmāpaṇaṁ*' and '*vāstu praveśa*' respectively.[22]

As for the foundation – laying ceremony, Laugākshi treats it as an extension of the marriage ritual and gives the rule for selection of the ground for the purpose. The newly-wed couple, he enjoins, should select a spot which is level and where waters flowing smoothly from all sides should meet and flow off towards the east or the north. Flower-giving plants and roots should be growing in it. Approaching it from the east or north, the husband accompanied by his wife should spread blades of east-pointing *darbha* grass on the ground and then fix posts for building the house. While driving the central posts into the pit dug for them, .they should recite the three verses: '*dhruvaṁ sinomyamṛtasya patñi*', '*ihaiva sthūne amṛtena roha*' and '*ā tvaṁ kumārastaruṇa*', meaning:

> "O post, stand here, fixed in the ground, long-lasting, and bringing prosperity to us and dropping clarified butter. May we enter the house blessed with heroes, with all heroes, with unharmed heroes, O post, like a lady true to her consort be erect in this place, imperishable, rich in horses and cows, rich in delight, firm and strong, overflowing with milk. May the young child come to thee. May the young man come to thee. May the calf come near thee. May the cup of *parisrut* (a kind of intoxicating drink prepared from herbs) come to thee. May they come to thee with pots of curds."[23]

When the bamboo staff (beam) was put on the middle post, the following

mantra was recited: 'Rightly ascend the post, O beam, erect, shining, drive off the enemies. Give us riches and valiant sons'.[24] With these mantras the other posts were also approached.

These rituals of the Sūtra period are, however, no longer current and the foundation-laying ceremony of a house is performed in a much different manner now. Water from seven places of pilgrimage, rivers, seven metals, seven food grains, seven herbs, earth dug from five different places (including sacred shrines, royal palace or seat of government, cross-roads, cowshed), five kinds of flowers, five kinds of fruit, five pegs, five stone slabs, four images carved on copper plates of bull, horse, elephant, man and a snake representing Ananta (Śeṣanāga) made of silver-wire, five small earthen pitchers and five earthen lamps are among the ritual objects needed on the occasion, according to Pandit Premnath Shastri, an astrologer-cum-ritualist who passed away sometime back."[25] Pandit Keshav Bhatt Jyotshi gives a much longer list and prescribes that the images of the bull, horse, elephant etc. should be drawn with slaked lime on the stone slabs.[26] The five earthen pitchers known as *vär* in Kashmiri are filled with the materials mentioned above and lowered into five pits dug on the site with the five stone slabs placed over them. The image of the bull is placed in the north eastern corner, that of horse in the south-eastern quarter, of man in the southwestern quarter, of elephant in the north-western quarter and of snake in the middle of the plot of land. Before laying the pitchers they are consecrated with mantras and worshipped with incense and lamp (*dhūpa - dīpā*). To establish the life-breath in the images (*jīvādāna*), sacred water is poured over them one by one and the mantra '*aśvinoḥ praṇastau te prāṇaṁ dattaṁ*' recited. Then with rice-grains and two blades of the *darbha* grass in hand obeisance is made to the Supreme Brahman and the day, date, fortnight and month of the ceremony mentioned. The Gāyatrī mantra is recited and after paying obeisance to Ganesha, the Pūjā for laying of foundation (*śanku pratiṣṭhā*) is started with the mantra '*Om tat-sat Brahma adya tāvat tithau adya māsasya pakṣasya tithau vāranavitāyaṁ Dhruvasya Hare Lakṣmyaḥ kūrmasya vṛshbhasya aśvasya narasya gajasya anantasya ātmana vaṅgmanaḥ kāyopārjita pāpānivāraṇārthaṁ śubha phala prāptyarthaṁ śanku pratiṣṭhā pūjanaṁ śilā pratiṣṭhā pūjanaṁ ahaṁ kariṣye/ Om kuruṣva*'[27] Pandit Keshav Bhatt Jyotshi prescribes that the ritual should begin with *kalaśa pūjā*. Offering *āsana* or seat to each of the deities and the five images with

two blades of *darbha* grass and rice-grains in the hand, they are invoked for worship in the traditional manner:

> *"Dhruvaṁ Harīṁ Lakṣmīṁ kūrmaṁ vṛshabhaṁ ashvaṁ naraṁ gajaṁ Anantaṁ āvāhyiṣyāmi/ Om āvāhaya."*

Then *pādya* or water for washing feet, sacred water with rice-grains (*arghya*) and bath (*snāna*) are offered to the five images together. After that each of the images is separately worshipped offering *āsana, argha, puṣpa* etc. Water is offered for rinsing mouth (*ācamanīya*) to *vṛṣabha* (bull) and other images with the mantra:

> '*śanno devīr abhiṣṭaya āpo bhavantu pītaye / śamyor abhisravantu naḥ / Dhruvāya Harāya Lakṣmyai, vṛṣabhāya śaṅku pratiṣṭhā śilāyai ācamanīyaṁ namaḥ*' /
>
> ['May the divine waters be propitious to us in all our sacrifices, and for our drinking purposes; may they pour upon us, removing present diseases and warding off future illnesses. Salutation to Dhruva, Hari, Lakshmi and *vrishabha* (the bull). Water is offered for rinsing mouth.']

Repeating the same for the other images also, *dakṣiṇā* is offered to the officiating priest. Last of all, sacrificial food is offered to these with the above mantra replacing the words '*ācamanīyaṁ namaḥ*' with *"Om namo naivedyaṁ nivedayāmi namaḥ"* ("I offer food to Dhruva, Hari, Lakshmi and *vriṣabha*") (*aśvāya, narāya, gajāya, Anatāya* in case of the images of horse, man, elephant and Śeṣanāga). The pitchers are laid down into the pits prepared for them in the north-eastern (*iśāna*), south-eastern (*agni*), south-western (*nairṛti*) and north-western (*vāyu*) quarters respectively and the stakes, with *närivan* (protection cord) tied and vermilion applied to them, are driven into the ground beside the pitchers. The stone slabs are placed over the pitchers. The ceremony generally concludes with the distribution of *naivedya* among those present and chanting of the Ṛgvedic hymn to Vishnu:

> '*Tat Viṣṇoḥ paramaṁ padaṁ sadā paṣyanti sūryaḥ / divivā cakṣurātataṁ*'// (Ṛg. I.22.00)
>
> ['Om, that Viṣṇu's seat supreme, the strong ones ever see (distinctly). As roams the eye in sky with unobstructed gaze.']

Pandit Keshav Bhatt Jyotshi has prescribed that *kalaśa pūjā* should be

performed in the beginning.[28] The *śaṅkus* or the stakes to be driven into the ground should be of Chinar wood and should be given '*ekaviṁśati snānam*' that is, bath with twenty-one ingredients. Thereafter *tarpaṇa* of *devas* (gods) and *ṛṣ*is (sages) should be performed and then the *śāṅkus* or stakes should be worshipped. Barley grains should be strewn to the right and *bali* or sacrificial food offered to a cow (*go - grāsa bali*).

Gṛha Praveśa or Inaugural Ceremony of New House

The *gṛha-praveśa* ceremony, called *prävish* in Kashmiri, is essentially performed by Kashmiri Hindus before entering a new house. It has been described in the Laugākshi Gṛhyasūtras as '*vāstu praveśaḥ*',[29] the word *"vāstu"* basically meaning 'an abode', 'a dwelling'. A newly married couple was enjoined upon to establish the sacrificial fire in a newly constructed house and then enter it to start life as householders. A special propitiatory dish (*sthālīpāka*) was cooked on the occasion and the entry was made with the following mantras addressed to Vastoṣpati or the guardian deity of the homestead after offering oblations:

> "Driving away calamity, Vastoṣpati, assuming all shapes, be a kind friend to us. Svāhā!"
>
> "Vāstoṣpati ! Receive us into thy protection; give us good entering and drive away from us evil. For what we ask thee, with that favour us: be a saviour to us, men and animals. Svāhā!"
>
> "Vāstoṣpati ! Be our furtherer, make our wealth increase in cows and horses, O Indu (Soma). Free from decay may we dwell in they friendship; give us thy favour, as a father to his sons. Svāhā!"
>
> 'Vāstoṣpati ! Let us be in a fellowship with thee, which may be valiant, joyful, and well proceeding. Protect our wishes when we rest and when we do our work. Protect us always, ye (gods), and give us welfare. Svāhā !"[30]

Having performed the rites, the householder was asked to offer food to Brahmans.

The present day house entry ceremony is not so simple. It is much more elaborate with Puranic elements having made their way into it alongside of the Vedic ritual. The juxtaposition is indeed quite interesting. There is, however, some

difference between the procedure laid down for it by Pandit Prem Nath Shastri and Pandit Keshav Bhatt Jyotshi, the former having tried to make it a bit too simple and the later over-elaborate and rather intricate. The only features that are common are performance of Pūjā at the main door of the new house and *tarpaṇa* of *devas* and *ṛṣis*. Pandit Keshav Bhatt's version has more regional features in it, and being older it appears to be more authentic. Pandit Prem Nath Shastri, on the other hand, seems to have kept in mind the considerations of the present day clientele.

(a) Procedure given by Prem Nath Shastri

The materials required for the ceremony are a religious text like the Bhagvad Gita, a picture of Mahālakṣmī or of the favourite deity, small red flags, a pitches filled with water, a pot full of milk, ghee, a bag full of rice, plateful of unhusked rice, a few grams of seven kinds of grains, baskets full of flowers, a charcoal stove with incense (bdellium and sesame seed) burning in it, some articles of common use in a house, vermilion, saffron, *nārivan* (protection cord), sesame seeds, and parched grains for Pūjā, honey, sweets, salt, walnuts etc. All these things arc to be kept at one place in the courtyard of the house.

The entrance or the main door is to be decorated with the small red-flags or buntings and a '*krūl*' or design of a flower-laden creeper painted over it. The syllable 'Om' is to be written on top of it.

A cow is to be brought and kept tied to a peg outside the house and fed. It is to be worshipped with flower-garlands and rice-grains and a *tilaka* is to applied on its forehead. Salutation is to be made to it with the mantra '*naḥ kevalānām pāyasaṁ prasūti āvehi mām kāmadugdhaṁ prasanna.*' Then facing entrance door the Pūjā is to be started mentioning the day, date, fortnight and month of the ceremony on the exact auspicious time astrologically fixed for it. Incense and lamp are to be offered to the presiding deities Ganesha, Kumara, Shri, Saraswati, deities of the ramparts of the Meru mountain, uttering '*Mahāgaṇapataye, Kumārāya, Śriyai, Saraswatyai, Meru - prākāra devatābhyaḥ dīpa - dhūpa saṅkalpāi siddhir-astu dīpo namaḥ dhūpo namaḥ.*'[31]

The second step, according to Pandit Prem Nath Shastri is of offering libations of water to the gods, sages and spirits of one's ancestors (*deva- ṛṣi-pitṛ tarpaṇa*),

which is done at the doorstep.[32] With the sacred thread over the left shoulder, the following words are uttered in case of gods:

> '*Oṁ bhū tripyatāṁ, Oṁ bhuvaḥ tṛpyatāṁ, Oṁ svah tṛpyatāṁ, Rudraḥ tṛpyatāṁ, Iśvaraḥ tṛpyatāṁ, Sadā-Śivaḥ tṛpyatāṁ, pṛthvī tṛpyatāṁ, āpaḥ tṛpyatāṁ, tejaḥ tṛpyatāṁ, vāyuḥ tṛpyatāṁ, ākāśaḥ tṛpyatāṁ, Sūryaṁ tarpayāmi, Somaṁ tarpayāmi, Varuṇaṁ tarpayāmi, kāmaṁ tarpayāmi, mokṣaṁ tarpayāmi, sarvadevatāḥ tarpayāmi.*'

Thereafter, with the sacred thread round the neck, the *ṛṣis* are offered libations uttering '*svāhā*' and with the sacred thread over the right shoulder the ancestors are sought to be satisfied with libations. Then the mantras for establishing life-breath '*sam vaḥ sṛjāmi hṛdyaṁ*', '*Āśvino prāṇas praṇastu*' and '*Dharmāya Adharmāya Dehilyai Khinkhinyai Meru - prākāra - devatabhyaḥ jīvadānaṁ parikalpayāmi namaḥ*' are recited for the 'deities of the Entrance Door'.[1] The deities of the Entrance Door, Dharma, Adharma, Dehalī, Khinkhinī and gods of the ramparts of the Meru mountain are then worshipped with rice-grains and blades of *darbha* grass in hand. They are invoked along with Ganesha and offered *pādya* (water for washing feet), *gandha* (fragrant materials), *puṣpa* (flowers), *arghya* (sacred water with rice-grains), *acamanīya* (water for rinsing the mouth) and *naivedya* (food).

After worshipping the deities of the entrance door, one enters with one's relatives and friends etc. into the house carrying the materials mentioned earlier. A picture of the favourite deity is placed at an elevated place (a stool or a table), and all the materials are placed before it. A broom-stick, grindstone and a mortar and pestle should also be carried there. After reciting '*sarva mangal mānglye*' or any other hymn and garlanding and applying vermilion *tilaka* to the picture of the favourite deity, an *āratī* should be performed by all those present and *nārivan* (protection cord) tied on their wrists. Then with the hymn '*Annapūrṇe sadāpūrṇe Śankar prāṇa-vallabhe*', *roṭh* (sweet bread-cakes) or *tâhâr* (rice cooked with turmeric and ghee) prepared in the kitchen of the new house should be distributed as *prasāda*.

(b) Pandit Keshav Bhatt Jyotshi's Procedure

Pandit Keshav Bhatt Jyotshi was a great Kashmiri ritual specialist who did significant work in the early decades of the 20th century in compilation of ritual texts considered relevant in Kashmir. Publishing them on his own expenses, he distributed them, mostly free of cost or at nominal prices, among the people so as to create awareness among them about authentic religious practices sanctioned by tradition. The procedure he has given for performing the house-entry rituals is elaborate and a trifle too lengthy, but nonetheless conforming to what has been followed by generations of Kashmiri Hindus. Describing them in his compilation '*Vedakalpadrumaḥ*' under the title '*veśma-pratiṣṭhā vidhānaṁ*' he lays down that some area in the north-eastern corner of the site on which the new house stands should be dug two-fingers deep and cleansed with cow dung and *pañcagavya* (five products of the cow). After consecration, the area should be marked by slaked lime and divided into 81 compartments to keep the materials required for the house-entry ceremony. The divisions should be marked by stakes to which the protection cord (*pañcaraṅga - sūtra*) should be tied and small red flags fixed on top. The space for the *kalaśas* should be near the stakes but outside the north-eastern division; that for the eight *kśestreśas* or tutelary deities of the consecrated area, to the south of the construction; to its right the space sacred to the pitchers representing the mother goddesses, to its right the eleven *kśetrapālas* or guardians of the quarters. Space for the *brahmakalśa,* seven walnuts, seven channels of clarified butter (*ghṛtadhāra saptasu*), *ṭekyapūts,* seven branches of the *divtamūn* ('the abode of gods'), seven rice-balls etc is similarly marked. The chief deities of Durgākśetra and those governing the ritual circle of the mother-goddesses, the *pañcāyatana* deities, *kśetrapatis* – Heraka in the east, Tripurāntaka in the south-west, Vetāla in the south, Agnijivhā in the northwest, Karāla in the south and so on. In all forty-five gods and goddesses, celestial beings and evil spirits are to be apportioned their places and propitiated. Then after obeisance to Gāyatrī and salutation to Mahāgaṇapati, the Lord of Vāstu is invoked for his presence with appropriate mantras and a hymn to Viṣṇu. Then the *naivedya* of fried liver and cakes of flour is offered to the planets and an *anna-homa* (food sacrifice) performed for the worship of the mother-goddesses. Then, as the time fixed for the main ceremony comes, the householder and his wife carrying a *pūrṇa-kumbha* or a pitcher filled

with holy water and a sword should enter through the main entrance door of the house together with a Brahmana (priest) well-versed in the Vedas. They should also carry with them articles of domestic use like a burning stove, a cutting knife, a broomstick, and deposit it near it. The Pūjā should start with the eastern arch (*pūrva-toraṇa*), with the ground being sprinkled with holy water from the pitcher (*sanivāri* in Kashmiri) which should be covered with an earthen lid (*parva* in Kashmiri) containing unhusked rice and nutmegs. Near that should be placed an earthen lamp filled with water and unhusked barley-cones for the *kśetreśas*. The same should be done with the arches erected in the other three directions also. The eastern arch should have three small flags or festoons, the others only two each. All the arches should be decorated with two floral garlands each. All the arches should be worshipped for averting of evil, reciting appropriate mantras. The stakes (*śaṅku*) should then be consecrated by reciting the Gāyatrī mantra and offered a bath with holy water mixed with sesame seeds, water mixed with milk, water poured from a golden vessel, water sprinkled with the *darbha* grass, water from a place of pilgrimage, water from the river, water poured from a conch, water mixed with honey, water mixed with all kinds of herbs, again chanting relevant mantras. Deities supposed to be presiding over different parts of the arches should be worshipped with different mantras. For instance, worship should be offered to Mahāganapati on the middle of the upper part of the arch, on its left and right to Śrī and Saraswatī and then to Dhātrī and Parjanya, on its middle to Varuṇa, on the middle of the flag to Śveta, on its left to Vajra, on its right to Śakti, and then to Agni, the Rigveda, the Kṛtayuga; on the garland to Śachī and Lakṣmī and so on. Then after going round all the arches one should go to the large entrance door in the north-west and worship the deities presiding over it – Mahāgaṇapati, Dharma, Adharma, Dehalī, Khinkhinī, gods of the ramparts of the Meru mountain. Then on the top of the door, libations of water, honey, ghee etc. should be offered to the *devas* (gods,) *ṛṣis* (sages) and *pitṛs* (ancestors) with accompanying mantras, Then the worship of the deities of the entrance door should commence with flowers being offered to Dvāravāsinī, Vāmā, Dvāralakṣmī, Viṣvakarmā and Khiṇkhinī. At the base of the door Gaṅgā, Yamunā, Dharma, Adharma, Vaiśrāvaṇa, Astra, Nāradaśastra, Dhatrī, Gaurī, Śri, Lakṣmī, Śuṣkā, Siddhi, Jayā, Vijayā, Raktā Cāmuṇḍā, Lamboṣṭhā, Vārāhī, Mangalādevī, Vastoṣpati, Kīrti, Māyā, Smṛddhi, Vṛddhi, Vibhūti, Lavaṇyā,

Subhagā, Sumanā, Saubhagyā, Dūtī, Bahurūpā and a host of other gods, goddesses and celestial beings – the 48 deities presiding over the construction of a house. Thereafter, parched rice-grains and wet barley -grains should be strewn. The wife should be on the left side of the householder and the Brahmana on the right, and he should be holding water pot in the left hand and sword in the right. Then a cow should be allowed to enter from the east and worshipped with flowers amongst sounds of different musical instruments and auspicious songs. The Lakṣmī Sūkta should be recited on this occasion. To keep the house safe from natural calamities one should enter saying, "I am here with this sword in hand to avert calamities like torrential rain or a flood of water, attack of wild animals, the wrath of a storm from befalling this house, to protect it from being gutted by fire, to save it from thieves and to keep back evil powers. Uttering 'Go away, go away', I am entering this auspicious house to rejoice with Vasus (gods) Vasiṣṭha, my family and children".[34]

Praying for happiness and increased prosperity in the new house, the *yajamāna* should enter other rooms carrying the sword and should go upstairs. Then the deities of the auspicious pitchers should be worshipped after releasing a pigeon in the air – '*vāstu pratiṣṭhā nimittam ghaṭikādeva pūjanaṁ*'. These deities include a host of gods, goddesses, celestial beings as well as evil spirits, like Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Maheśavara, Śiva, Īśānā, Eleven Rudras, Śangāraka, Sarpa, Varuṇa, Budha (Mercury), Sadaspati (lords of the seat or of the sacrificial assembly), Mṛtyu, Kāpālika, twelve Ādityas, Mars, Moon, Vāyu, Vāmadeva, Śakti, Nandinī,' Dūravāsinī, Cincinī, Yama, Ghaṇṭā, Kālarātri, Yāmādevi, Ambikā, Ḍakinī, Aṭaṭṭahāsinī, Dharitrī, Jayantī, Airundī, Aughehī, Krodhinī, Aśnajihvā, Ulkāpatnī, Garjinī, Hāriṇī, Dhuryacandrikā, Nakṣatrikā, Grahyā, Bodinya, Bhiṣaṇā, Parjanya Siṁhakrāntā, Pauṣyā, Rohinī, Harikeṣinī, Ghorā, Sarvamukhyā, Bhīmā, Bhairavī, Jharjinī, Dhārā, Pichavaktrā, Bhadrakalī, Haridrayā, Ghoriṇī, Vācinī, Carā, Vṛshṇī, Dhūsarānanā, Indra, Agni, Vyoma the *navagrahas* (nine planets) etc.[35] *Bali* (sacrificial offering) should be then given to the *kśetreśas*.

Thereafter one should go to the main post or column on which the '*ratna vāṭikā*' or the 'Garden of Jewels' has been painted (as the abode of the gods). Coming to the post, the Vedic verses mentioned earlier – '*Dhruvasya no amṛtasya patnī*', '*ihaiva sthūnai*', '*atvā kumārastaruṇā avatso jagata*', '*riteṇa*

sthūnamadhiroha' – are to be recited. Two *kśetreśas* represented by two small earthen pitchers called *sanivāri* in Kashmiri should be placed there and forty-five deities (of the homestead) should be worshipped at the base of the column, a little above that, further above, in the middle, below that, again a little above that, to the east, to the north-east etc. A garland has to be tied to the column and *naivedya* offered. Pūjā is then offered to the deities of the homestead, '*gṛhapīṭṭha - yāga devatā*, in different rooms, to Vārāhi in the *siddhasthāna* or the Pūjā room ('*ṭhokur kuṭh*' in Kashmiri), Mahālakṣmī in *śrīsthāna* or the store-room (*bāna kuṭh* in Kashmiri); Tejavatî at the door, Vajravatî on the column, Manglā in the cow-shed, Tvaṣtuvakrā on the porch ('*branḍa - kany*' in Kashmiri), Dvāravāsinī on the door-step, Khinkhinī on the upper part of the door ('*hang*' in Kashmiri), Śeṣa on middle panel of the door, Vṛṣabhanandinī to the north-east, and so on. Articles of domestic use like the rice-pot, water-pot, pestle, broomstick, cradle, mortar, utensils, fire-pot ('*manana*' in Kashmri), knife, club, hearth or stove, ladle, lamp, ladle for stirring, winnowing basket etc."[36]

Naivedya or food consecrated to forty *yoginīs* is to be prepared and distributed at the place where the *homa* is performed. The Vāstupuruṣa or the deity governing architecture is to be worshipped with flowers and prayed for bestowing sons, grandsons, happiness, abundant money, good health, long life, affluence etc. Forgiveness should be then sought from God for all sins of omission and commission. The ceremony concludes with music and auspicious songs.

Pandit Keshav Bhatt Jyotshi has given an even longer list for the ceremony than Pandit Prem Nath Shastri, which includes eleven metals (gold, silver, copper, bronze, iron, zinc, brass, lead, tin, bell-metal and different gems, jewels and rubies for the '*ratna vāṭikā*' literally the 'Garden of Gems', the abode of the mother-goddesses. All kinds of local herbs and spices are also included in the list. For the *homa* to be performed on the occasion, his list of materials required is not much different from that prescribed by Pandit Prem Nath Shastri. Unlike the latter, however, Pandit Keshav Bhatt does not find any fault with a non-vegetarian *naivedya*.

Kashmir Shaiva Ritual

As a philosophical system, Kashmir Shaivism presents a unique vision of the

relationship between God, man and the world, and emphasizes oneness of consciousness. It has also a well defined ritual system with its roots in the Tantric practices of Sāivāgamas. Among the schools that have contributed in a significant manner to the development of the Shaiva philosophy of Kashmir, the Kaula, Krama and Trika systems have been most prominent. Though the Shaivāgamic schools go back in time to the 7th century or even earlier as far as their evolution is concerned, it was in the mid-tenth century that Abhinavagupta synthesized and syncretized them and integrated them all into non-dual Kashmir Shaiva philosophical system together with their mystic doctrines and secret practices, drawing upon mainly from Tantric texts like *Mālīnivijaya, Svacchanda Bhairava, Vijñāna Bhairava, Rudra Yāmala, Ucchuṣma Bhairava, Mṛgendra, Mātaṅga, Siddhayogeśvarī, Yoginī, Netra* and *Ānanda Bhairva.* Abhinava brought these doctrines and rituals together under a single unified exegetic plan in the Tantrāloka, his magnum opus, These included many esoteric rites of the *vāma mārga* (left path) and involved ritual consumption and offering of meat and wine and also ritual intercourse. Interpreting them within their own conceptual framework, the Kashmir Shaivites transformed them by interiorizing them and elevating them beyond the level of outer ritual.

The ritualistic system of Kashmir Shaivism with *mantra, mudrā, nyāsa, maṇḍala, dīkṣā, caryā, kriyā, upāsanā* and *yāga* as its constituents, has been dealt with comprehensively by Abhinavagupta in his *Tantrāloka* and *Parātriśika Vivaraṇa.* Many of its elements have found their way into Kashmiri Hindu ritual practices in general and many of them have been forgotten. We have referred .to some of these earlier in the context of *nitya karma* or daily rites like *sandhyā and naimittika karma* or occasional rites like *antyeṣṭi* and *śrāddha.*

(1) Mantra

As for *mantra,* it is important to know that Kashmir Shaivites have at the centre of their analysis and interpretation of mantric utterance a whole philosophy that links logos with the self- manifestation of Reality or Divine Consciousness. It expresses itself as *parāvāk* or the Supreme Word in its undifferentiated stage which evolves or descends through the intermediary stages of *paśyanti, madhyamā* and *vaikharī* into the created universe. To put it in the words of Natalia Isayeva, "It creates the world while itself assuming the various forms of the sounds and the

letters of the Sanskrit alphabet. The vowels and the consonants are represented as manifold variations of an inner vibration which is inherent in Shiva's own consciousness; of definitely shaped and fixed stages in the gradual creation (*srishti*) of the external world."[37]

In Kashmir Shaiva analysis of mantric composition, the phonetic elements or letters of the Sanskrit alphabet are condensed forms of creative energy and can be arranged in two ways as components of a mantra – the Mātṛkā and the Mālinī. Matṛkā, which literally means the little mother, is the creative matrix in which phonemes are arranged in a way that the vowels symbolizing Śiva precede the consonants which represent Śakti. In Mālinī, however, the vowels and the consonants are mixed together without any consideration of serial order, the word literally meaning 'the goddess who wears a garland of the fifty letters of the Sanskrit alphabet'. Abhinavagupta has subtly analyzed the mystical dimensions of the meaning contained in the two symbolical systems in his *Parātriṣika Vivaraṇa*, giving the mantra of Mātṛka as '*akṣahrīm*', and of Mālinī as '*naphahrīṁ*'.[38] As they emanate from the five mouths of Bhairava, the mantras are to be recited five times for each face. In the Tantrāloka also Abhinava has discussed various aspects of the sacred power of the incantation of mantric syllables and their meaning. We are not to discuss here the metaphysics of mantra as presented by Kashmir Shaiva texts. Apart from the Mātṛkā and Mālinī, these mantras include the '*ahaṁ*' mantra, '*sauha*' mantra, '*navātma*' mantra, '*parāpara*' mantra and so on giving rise to a permutation and combination of numerous sacred syllables prescribed for different meditative and ritual purposes. The use of various *bīja* mantras or seed syllables and mystic syllables like '*Om juṁ saḥ*' in the beginning and '*astrāy phaṭ*', '*huṁ phaṭ*', '*vaṣaṭ*', '*vauṣaṭ*' at the end is an important feature of Shaiva rituals instead of chanting the Vedic mantras. It may be noted that the *bījā* mantras or seed syllables are regarded as the sonic symbols of the deities. Together with the half - *mātrās*, "the wordy flow of consciousness", says Navjivan Rastogi, quoting the Tantrāloka, "consists of 81 letters, which are included in the 50 letters of the Sanskrit alphabet."[39]

(2) *Mudrā*

Mudrās or symbolic postures, *maṇḍala* or sacred diagrams, *nyāsa* or mental

assignment of various parts of the body to different deities, and *dikṣā* or initiation are also important features of Shaiva rituals. In one form or other they continue to be associated with the ritual practices followed by the Kashmiri Hindus even to this day. Abhinavagupta has devoted the 32nd *Ahnīka* or chapter of *Tantrāloka* to unraveling the concept of '*mudrā*': "*idamim mudrā - vidhim abhidhum - upakramate*", describing *mudrā* as *pratibimba* or reflection ("*mudrā ca pratibimbātmā*") and giving utmost importance to the *Khechari Mudra*: "*tārā pradhāna phuṭa śrī khecarī devātmikā*."[40] In his *Parātriśikā Vivaraṇa* he talks of the *trikoṇa mudrā* or the display *śiva-trikoṇa* and *Śakti - trikoṇa*. (Shiva and Shakti triangles), symbolizing *jñāna-śakti* and *kriyā-śakti* respectively, the two triangles together being known as *ṣatkoṇa mudrā*.[41] In actual ritualistic practices of Kashmiri Hindus, twenty-four *mudrās* and eight *mudrās* are referred to in the contexts of Gāyatrī Japa and Saṅdhyā. The twenty-four *mudrās* are: *sumukhaṁ, sampuṭaṁ, vitataṁ, vistritaṁ, dvimukhaṁ, trimukhaṁ, caturmukhaṁ, pañcamukhaṁ, ṣaṇmukhaṁ, adhomukhaṁ, vyāpakañjalīṁ, śakaṭaṁ, yamapāśaṁ, grathitaṁ, unmukhonmukhaṁ, pralambaṁ, mahākrāntaṁ, mudgaraṁ* and *pallavaṁ*. The eight *mudrās* displayed during *Sandhyā* are: *surabhiḥ, jñanaṁ, vairāgyaṁ, yoniḥ, śankhaḥ, pañkajaṁ, lingaṁ* and *nirvānaṁ*. But these *mudrās* or postures are not peculiar to Kashmiri Hindu rituals alone and are more meditative than ritualistic. There are numerous other *mudrās* mentioned in ancient texts of Kashmir, but in Kashmir Shaivism the most important *mudrās* arc *khecarī, bhairava / bhairavī mudrā, kūrma-mudrā* and others.

(3) *Manḍala*

Manḍala or the mystic diagram is of great importance in the Shaiva-Tantric system of ritualistic worship which was once widely prevalent in Kashmir. Literally meaning 'a circle', "it is a visual aid for concentration and introvertive meditation". With its help the aspirant can attain mystic insights and *siddhis* or spiritual powers of which it is a graphic representation. In the Tantrāloka, Abhinavagupta has defined *manḍala* as *devatācakraṁ* or a mystic circle in which a deity is installed.[42] He has described in amazing detail the process of drawing various *manḍalas*, of which there are, according to him, more than hundred types and varieties depending on the nature of the central deity. Giving his interpretation of the *triśūlābja-manḍalaṁ* or the '*manḍala* of the trident and lotuses' in the Parātriśikā Vivaraṇa, he explains

that the triangle shown in it depicts the "divine Shakti in all her aspects".[43] We shall discuss the aesthetic aspects of the *maṅḍala* in our chapter on ritual art.

(4) Nyāsa

Nyāsa is mental assignment of the various parts of the body to different deities. It is a means of 'seating of power' in one's own body by touching limbs with the hand accompanied by appropriate mantras. "As a temple is consecrated before it becomes a sacred place of worship, so before God is invoked, this body (the true temple of God) should be dedicated to him", writes Srisa Chandra Vasu, explaining the consecration of the body through *nyāsa*.[44] In Tantrāloka, Abhinavagupta discusses the varieties of *sāmānya nāysa* or general assignment and *viśeṣa nyāsā* or special assignment, explaining the difference between the two.[45] The various types of *nyāsa* that he has mentioned besides the above two are the *Śaiva nyāsa,* the *Śākta nyāsa, kripanyādi, Mālinī, Māṭṛkā, pādāhava, parā, śodha* and *svatantra.* Of the Shaiva and Shakta *nyāsas* alone, he has counted six varieties each. However, the *nyāsas* that we come across in general ritual practices are of two types, the *kara-nyāsa* in which five fingers of the hand are purified by means of appropriate mantras and the *aṅga-nyāsa* or *ṣadānga nyāsa* in which six limbs of the body are consecrated, viz. the heart, the head, the crown of the head, the shoulders, the eyes and the palm and the back of the hand. We have already referred to these while discussing the procedure of performing the *Sandhyā.*

The Shaiva Tantric cult rituals are no longer prevalent among the Hindus of Kashmir, at least not in the form they have been depicted in the religious texts. Some of their elements have, however, been incorporated in the general religious practices of the community. Their description is, therefore, mainly of academic interest and can prove helpful in tracing the evolution of ritualistic structures of the religious life of Kashmir Hindus.

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CHAPTER 8

Pūjā Rites and Festivals

Pūjā or worship rites form an integral part of the religious life of the Kashmiri Hindus, both at the individual and collective levels. Unlike *saṁskāras* or the rituals associated with life-processes, they are intimately related to spiritual well-being or religious cultivation of a person or a group in accordance with the cult to which one may belong. Though Pūjā rites may appear to belong to the category of individual religious activity, their performance is not necessarily limited to individuals alone. As pointed out by the Japanese scholar Musachi Tachikawa, group religious activity is supported by the group, but it is common for individual religious activity to be included."[1] An example of this is provided by the congregational worship performed at temples and shrines like Hari Parbat and Kshir Bhavani in Kashmir, which is characterized not by a split but by an inter-connectedness of the two. Religious festivals of course are another obvious instance. One can see Pūjā rites being performed at private homes as well as temples, shrines, ashrams etc. A person performing these rites in the *ṭhokur-kuṭh* or the Pūjā room of his home, alone or with his family, was a regular affair, and is still so to some extent, the recent displacement of the community not-withstanding. The fact that the displaced Kashmiri Pandits have carried even their favourite deities with them to the places where they have taken shelter and have built replicas of some of their popular shrines there is quite interesting to note in this context. Thus, there is a replica of Kshir Bhavani shrine at Jammu and a Hari Parbat at Faridabad built by some nostalgia-stricken individuals.

There are different rituals prescribed by sacred texts for the *nitya* or daily

worship and *naimattika* or Pūjā performed on sacred dates and special occasions. The latter includes religious festivals, birthdays, propitiation of the planetary deities etc. in which elements from folk-religion, mystic rites, cultic practices all combine and co-exist as constituents, exuding a peculiarly Kashmiri flavour and yet retaining a pan-Hindu character. Conceptualization of cosmic forces and symbolization of ceremonial acts and movements are significant aspects of Kashmiri Hindu Pūjā rites, their basic ritual structure being related to the *ṣodaśa upcāra - pūjā* or the sixteen-step worship service which we have referred to in the introductory chapter. This worship service is the norm followed by Hindus everywhere with some modifications and variations prompted by local factors. Performed with or without the intercession of a priest, these steps include the preliminaries and the main Pūjā. The preliminary and preparatory steps consist of purification of oneself by sipping a little water (*ācamana*), controlling breath (*prāṇayāma*), reciting the Gayatri mantra and meditating upon the mental image of the deity to be worshipped (*dhyāna*). Obeisance is then paid to Ganapati, which is followed by consecration of the ritual objects including the water-pot, the conch, the bell and the lamp (*kalaśa - śaṅkha - ghaṇṭā - dīpa - pūjana*). The process of purification is a little more elaborate for the adept and the aspirant (*upāsaka*) and is five-fold in character – purification of oneself, purification of the place, purification of the materials used, purification of the mantras and purification of the deity.[2] As for purification of one's own self by the worshipper, it is both outer as well as inner. The outer purification is achieved by bath, the inner by purification of elements or *bhūtaśuddhi, praṇāyāma* and *nyāsa*. Describing the whole process of purification as "indispensable", M.P. Pandit writes that the place of worship is sanctified by cleaning and wiping it, decorating it with "flowers, incense, camphor, lights and colour".[3] The ritual objects are consecrated by lustration or sprinkling with sanctified water accompanied by recitation of mantras. The mantras themselves are to be purified by "appropriate means", which include *japa* or repetition of the Mātṛkā - mantra, the process being called *mantraśuddhi*. This elaborate and comprehensive purification is however not meant for the common worshipper.

It is only when the purification of self, the ritual site and the ritual objects is over that the main Pūjā is performed. It starts with *āvāhana* or invocation to the deity to be present at the ritual setting, after which life is infused in the image by

means of the prescribed mantras. Called *prāṇa-pratiṣṭhā* or *jivādāna*, this step indicates that it is not the external image but the living deity present in it who is worshipped. After being invoked, the deity is welcomed as a guest and respectfully offered the seat (*āsana*), the water for washing feet, (*pādya*), the libation of sacred water with rice grains, *dūrva* grass and flowers (*arghya*), water for rinsing the mouth (*ācamanīya*), bath for purification (*snāna*), the garment, lower and upper (*vastra* and *upavastra*), the fragrant materials (*gandha*), the flowers (*puṣpa*), the incense (*dhūpa*), the lamp (*dīpa*) and last of all the food (*naivedya*) which is partaken of by the performer and the participants as the deity's gift of grace. All these offerings made to the deity are accompanied by recitation of appropriate mantras. The worshipper concludes the Pūjā with *namaskāra* or salutation to deity and then offering flowers and waving lamps (*ārātrikā*) with mantras he bids farewell to it (*visarjana*). If the Pūjā happens to be performed by a priest on behalf of the patron (*yajamāna*), he (the priest) is given his *dakṣiṇā* or fees in the shape of cash or gifts or both. If it is a congregational or public Pūjā performed at temples and sacred shrines, the concluding act is that of *pradakṣiṇā* or circumambulation of the sacred image with the performer keeping his right side towards it.

These then are the elements that form the basic structure of Kashmiri Hindu Pūjā rites whether performed at the individual or group level, at homes or in temples and shrines, for spiritual or material gains. Within this broad structural and conceptual framework, however, many variations, modifications and additions have emerged which have given shape to the peculiarities that can be identified as Kashmiri. The purification process in Kashmiri Pūjā ritual "transforms a mundane setting into precisely and minutely conceived replica of a sacred cosmos" with the ritual site and ritual objects being consecrated to divine entities. The mantras explicitly define the act of offering of gifts to the gods from water for washing the feet to incense and lamps. But it is here that the regional factors come into play as can be seen in the choice of the mantras chanted (Vedic mantras being juxtaposed with Puranic and Tantric mantras), in the order and manner of the ritual movements, in the materials used for offerings (walnuts, for instance) and several other things. Thus, the deity is bathed with anything between five ingredients (*pañcāmṛta* or the five ambrosia – milk, curds, clarified butter, honey and sugar) and twenty-one added to water. The anointment is done with *sindūra* or vermilion, saffron and

sandalwood paste, cleaning and wiping the deity to a polished shine. Another notable feature is the cults built around the local mother goddesses like Śārikā, Rāgnyā, Śāradā, Jwālā, Tripurā, Jyeṣṭhā etc. who are seen as various manifestations of Shakti and are very popular in Kashmir. Of particular interest are the sectarian variations of the Vedic Gayatri Mantra which are made according to the deity worshipped and the religious sect to which the worshipper belongs. Apart from these, there is the Tantric influence for instance that of the Kaula practices, on Kashmiri Pūjā rituals with the frequent use of *bīja mantras* or seed syllables, which are considered to be the sonic form of the deity. Then there is the way *nyāsa,* (both *kara-nyāsa* and *aṅga-nyāsa*), or "seating of power" in one's own body by touching one's limbs with one's hand is performed. Special procedures are adopted for special Pūjās, as we have said in the introductory chapter, which have their own functions and symbolic meanings. It would be worthwhile to have a look at some of the Pūjā rites peculiar to Kashmiri Hindus. Apart from the daily practices which we have described and which are not much different from those performed by Hindus in general, these include the Pūjās that form an important feature of Kashmiri Hindu festivals. Linked with civilizational memory which they help to enact, festivals and celebrations, it may be said, are cultural events internalized by a people to an extent that they feel "compelled" to participate in them as they find their identity in doing so. Some of the "most foundational" of them, as Prof. Daya Krishna has pointed out in his book 'Prolgomena to Any Future Historiography of Cultures and Civilizations', are those "with which a civilization renews its identity through relating to the events that are supposed to have occurred in its primordial past".

An interesting fact about Kashmiri Hindu festivals that needs investigation is that in some cases their dates fall one day earlier than the day they are celebrated in other parts of the country. Shivarātri and Janmāshtamî are two examples of such festivals. We shall begin with the description of Shivarātri, the festival which Kashmiri Hindus regard as their greatest, taking note of this fact.

1. Shivarātri or *Herath* – the Mystery of *Trayodashī*

Shivarātri is celebrated by Kashmiri Pandits on *trayodaśī* or the thirteenth of the dark half of the month of Phalguna (February-March) and not on *caturdaśī* or

the fourteenth as in the rest of the country. Not that *caturdaśī is* not the included in their scheme of celebrations, but it is *trayodaśī* that is more significant as it is on that day, or rather night, that the main Pūjā is performed. *Caturdaśī* is an important day of the celebrations which extend from the *pratipadā* or the first day of the dark fortnight to *amāvasyā* or the last day or even up lo the tenth day of the bright half. The Pandits consider it to be their most important festival and call it '*herath* in Kashmiri – a word derived from the Sanskrit '*Hararātri*' or the 'Night of Hara'– Hara being another name of Shiva.

The *pratipadā* or the first day of the festival is called '*hury ŏkdŏh*'. On that day the entire house is thoroughly cleaned and smeared. On the *aṣṭamī* or the eighth day Kashmiri Hindus would take a sacred bath and go to Hari Parbat the shrine of goddess Śārikā, a manifestation of Durgā. They would circumambulate all the sacred places that stood in that area including Cakreśwarī, Śārikā, Kālī, Gaṇapati, Devī Āṅgan, Sapta Riṣi, Hariśwarī, Amrit Kuṇḍ and the shrines of Krishna, Rama, Hanumana, Shankara etc. The tenth day is celebrated as '*dyāra daham*' or '*dhana dashmī*, the Kashmir word '*dyār*' (<Skt *dināra*) meaning money. On this day people would gamble with cowry shells called '*hāra*' in Kashmiri. On the eleventh and twelfth day Pūjā is performed, but the main worship is performed on the thirteenth, followed by celebrations on the fourteenth. Here we are concerned with the *tryodaśī* (and also *dvādaśī*) Pūjā, as on the evening twilight of that day Shiva is said to have appeared as a Jwālā-linga or a *linga* of flame. The Pūjā is also called Bhairavotsva, or the 'Bhairava festival' in the Tantric texts of Kashmir, the term Bhairava being synomous with Shiva in Kashmir. Bhairava, regarded as the Supreme Being, and his consort Bhairavi said to be his Shakti or cosmic energy manifesting herself as the phenomenal world, are appeased through Tantric worship on this occasion. The manner in which this worship is to be conducted is elaborately described in the Tantric texts of Kashmir. These texts include: (1) Dharma Cintāmaṇi, (2) Harihara Vāsara Vinoda, (3) Maheśvara Kalpa (4) Śiva Saṁhitā (5) Sūryārṇava, (6) Yoginī Tantra (7) Siddhānta Tantra (8) Vamakeśvara Tantra and (9) Rudrayāmala Tantra. Vaṭuka Bhairava, a mind-born son of Mahādevī, is one of the principal deities receiving the worship. Before we proceed to describe some of the main features of the Shivarātri Pūjā in Kashmir it would be relevant to give the story that throws light on how it originated.

The Story of the Jwālālinga

Mahadeva Shiva, so the story goes, thought of his *Paramaśakti* in one early dawn of human creation. In his meditation he spotted her in a beautiful Himalayan forest called Sundarnāl where she was giving instructions to the Yoginīs, who were her own creation, to prepare savoury meat dishes, and other delicacies for the consumption of human beings. Mahadeva came to the place in the form of the five-faced, ten-armed and fifteen-eyed Svacchanda Bhairava. As he approached near, the Yoginīs were sacred by his terrible-looking form and tried to run away. Seeing them panic, Paramaśakti Mahāmāyā angrily cast a glance into a pitcher full of water. From the pitcher emerged Vaṭuka Bhairava, fully armed with all his weapons – a spear, a pitcher, a rosary, a snake, a *ḍamrū* (small hand drum) and a noose, with his two lower hands in the boon granting and protection giving postures (*mudrās*). But for all his ten hands, Vaṭuka, was unable to ward away Svacchanda Bhairava, so Devi cast a glance into another pitcher of water and from that came out another Bhairava equipped with various weapons, but more pleasing to behold. She gave him the name Rāma or Ramaṇa. In this manner she created many more *gaṇas* or attendants and asked them all to ward off Mahadeva in his terrible-looking form of Svacchanda Bhairava.

As the *gaṇas* prepared to strike at Svacchandanātha Shiva, he suddenly disappeared and all of them came back to Paramaśakti, bewildered and exhausted. The Goddess blessed both Vaṭuka Bhairava, who embodied *rajoguṇa* or the quality of passion, and Rāma or Ramaṇa, an embodiment of *sattvaguṇa* or the quality of goodness, that they shall be worshipped by human beings and receive sacrificial offerings on *trayodaśī,* the day she had created them. Vaṭuka Bhairava, or the Bhairava in the form of a *brahmacārī,* received precedence over Rāma or Ramaṇa as he was created earlier. Those who would worship them on that day, she said, would have all their wishes fulfilled. She then asked the *yoginīs* to offer the dishes they had prepared to the *gaṇas*. Just at that time Shiva appeared in the form of an awe-inspiring Jwālālinga, dazzling with brilliance. At this all the *gaṇas* were terrified and sought the shelter of Vaṭuka and Ramaṇa who assured them of protection. Vaṭuka and Ramaṇa then approached the *linga* and tried to find out its beginning and end. Vaṭuka went in the upward direction and Ramaṇa in the downward direction. But they failed to discover either its beginning or its end.

Exhausted and exasperated, they began to sing the praises of the Jwālālinga. At this time, the *yoginīs* merged with the Paramaśakti whose creation they were, and the Paramaśakti merged with the Jwālālinga. It was the thirteenth of the dark half of the month of Phalugha when this happened. As the time when the *linga* made its appearance was the *pradoṣakāla* or the hour of the evening twilight, some people thought that this was the appropriate time for Shivarātri worship, while others chose to worship at midnight when, in their view, the *linga* became pacified.

A similar story is given in the Bhringīsh Saṁhitā with the difference that it were Brahma and Vishnu, instead of Vaṭuka Bhairava and Rāma Bhairava, whose pride Shiva humbles by assuming the form of Jwālālinga.[4] There is no reference to Svacchanda Bhairava in this story, nor to the Yoginīs. Brahma and Vishnu are shown prostrating before the *linga* and singing hymns in its praise. Giving *pradoṣakāla* of the thirteenth of the dark half of Phalguna as the time when the *linga* made its appearance, the Saṁhitā calls the night both Shivarātri as well as *Bhairavotsva*. Those who do not worship Bhairava and the *kṣetreśa*s on this night, it says, die prematurely and are reborn as *rākṣa*s. They live a life beset with obstacles and troubles without having any wife or children to cheer them up. But those who perform the worship of Bhairava on this occasion live a happy and prosperous life with all their family members.[5] The Nilamata Purāna,[6] on the other hand, describes Shivarātri as a festival celebrated by the people in early Kashmir on the *caturdaśī* of Phalguna – the way it is celebrated in the rest of India.

Devotees observe fast during the day on Herath and perform a *yāga* or fire sacrifice during the night, worshipping Shiva, Bhairavī, Ganesha and Vaṭuka along with their *gaṇas* or attendants and *kśetrapālas* (guardians of the quarters). Vaṭuka Bhairava, represented by a pitcher full of water in which walnuts are kept for soaking, is specially worshipped and the ceremony is called '*vaṭuk barun*' in Kashmiri, which means filling the pitcher of water representing the Vaṭuka Bhairava with walnuts and worshipping it. The soaked walnuts are later distributed as *naivedya* on or after *amāvasyā* (the last day of the dark fortnight) of Phalguna up to the tenth day of the bright fortnight. But it is the Pūjā that is most important and comprises elaborate Tantric rituals with several Vedic elements.

The Pūjā or worship rituals begin with *Kalaśa Pūjā*, as is the procedure in all major Pūjās. We have referred to *Kalaśa Pūjā* in our chapter on Mekhal indicating

how all gods and divinities reside inside the *kalaśa*. It is a rather lengthy affair in which the *Brahma kalaśa* is drawn with slaked lime or rice flour on the floor and a pitcher full of sanctified water, having sacred syllables and symbols marked on it with saffron paste or vermilion, is placed on the drawing of an eight- petalled lotus. Most of the mantras recited in the Pūjā are Vedic and the standard *upacāras* of offering seat, sacred water with rice grains, fragrances, incense, flowers, lamp etc. to the deities of the *kalaśa* are adhered to, inviting them and "giving life" to them and worshipping them after performance of *nyāsa* in which different limbs of the body are assigned to different parts of the Gāyatrī mantra according to the prescribed procedure. All the deities of the Shivarātri *yāga* or Shivatrātri sacrifice are also worshipped along with the *kṣetreśa*s including, Devīputra (son of the Goddess) Herakanātha and Devīputra Vaṭukanātha.

Then the Shivarātri Pūjā commences. Reverence is shown to Shiva represented by the clay-image called the *sanipŏtul* by placing it on the seat (*āsana*) which is sprinkled with water for purification along with utterance of the prescribed mantra. Strewing two blades of the *darbha* grass on the ground, Prithvī the Earth goddess, is offered *gandha* (fragrant materials) and *argha* (sacred water with rice-grains) requesting her to consecrate the *asāna: 'Om Pṛthvī tvayā dhṛta lokā devī tvam Viṣṇunā dhṛtā / tvam ca dhāraya mām devī pavitraṁ kuru ca āsanaṁ//'* ('Om. O Earth all creatures are upheld by thee; O Devi, thou art supported by Vishnu; support me thou O Goddess, and sanctify my seat.') The seat having been offered, the *iṣṭadeva* (favourite deity) is meditated upon with a hymn (the popular hymn of Shiva being '*karpūra gauraṁ*'). Performing *nyāsa,* various parts of the body – the heart, the head, the crown of the head, the shoulders, the eyes, the feet and the thumbs and fingers of the two hands – are mentally consigned to *praṇava* (Om) and the *vyāhṛtis* and various parts of the Gāyatrī Mantra. Sesame seeds and barley grains are strewn all around to ward off evil spirits with the mantra '*apasarpantu te bhūta*' ('Let all those evil spirits' elementals go away, the evil spirits that on earth do dwell, and the evil spirits that obstacles raise, may they be destroyed by the command of Shiva') and *närivan* (protection cord) hand tied on the right is wrists of the performer and participants of the Pūjā and *tilaka* applied to their foreheads. Then making *saṇkalpa* (declaring the intention) to perform the Pūjā of the deities presiding over the ritual, salutations are made to Shivarātri or the 'Night

of Shiva'. Permission is sought from the deities presiding over the Pūjā rites for performing the Pūjā, which is commenced assuming that the permission has been granted.[7] Starting with the *kṣetreśas* or the deities guarding the quarters – Deviputra (Son of the Devi) Vaṭukanātha in the east, Bhūtabala (group of *bhūtas*) in the south-east, Agnivetālarāja in the south, Bahukhātakeśwara in the south-west, regional Kśetrapāla in the West, Mangalarāja in the north-west, Yoginībala (group of *yoginīs*) in the north, Viśvaksena in the north-east, Jayaksena in the upward region, Teja in the nether region and Caṇḍa in the middle region (these divinities are all the deities presiding over the Shivarātri *yāga*), the Viṣṇupañcāyatana deities, Abhayankarī Devî, Kśemankarī Bhavanī, Sarvaśatrughātinī and the local Bhairava on the *trayodaśī* night.[8] The *kṣetreśas* for the *dvādaśī* Pūjā are different. All these deities are invoked one by one for their presence at the Pūjā site with *babara kāṭha* flowers in hand. Also invited with two blades of *darbha* grass in hand are Mahāgaṇapati, Kumāra, Śrī, Saraswatī, Lakṣmī. Viśwakarmā, deites of the entrance door (*dvāra-devatā*), Prajāpati, Brahmā, deities of the Kalaśa, Brahmā-Viṣṇu-Maheśwara. the four Vedas, the 'Lord of the Month' Nārayaṇa (for the month of Phalguna), Cakrin (the 'Holder of the Discus') with his Śakti, Govinda with Kriyā, Durgā, Tryambaka, Varuṇa, Yajñapuruṣa, deities of the sacrifice to the Pitaras, Agniśvāta etc.

After performing *praṇāyāma,* these deities are offered *pādya* (water for washing feet) with the mantra '*śanno devī*'. The *pādya* contains these five ingredients - *lājā* (parched grains), *kuṁkuma* (saffron), *sarvauṣadhi* (an assortment of different herbs), *darbhāṅkura* (shoots of the *darbha* grass) and water. The mantra for *pādya* is '*Bhagvantaḥ pādyaṁ - pādyaṁ*'. The remnant of the *pādya* water is poured back into the vessel from which it was poured. *Pādya* is followed by offering sacred water for *arghya* to show reverence to the deities. The *arghya* consists of eight ingredients – water, milk, *viṣṭara* grass, ghee, curds, rice-grains, barley-grains and sesame. It is offered with salutations to the deities and is accompanied by the mantras '*tveśam vayaṁ Rudraṁ yajñaṁ*', '*āpo hiṣṭhā mayobhuva*', '*yo vaḥ śivatamo rasaḥ*'. Then the water for rinsing the mouth (*ācamanīya*) is offered with appropriate mantras. The deities are bathed with twenty-one ingredients, which are: water mixed with milk, curds, ghee, honey, parched grains, mustard seed, sesame, barley grains, unhusked rice, *viṣṭhara* grass, *dūrva* grass, mud, ashes, fruit, candy

sugar, *pañcāmṛta* (five ambrosias), *pañcagavya* (a mixture of five products of the cow), camphor, herbs, fragrant materials and flowers.[10]

Then follows the '*deva-ṛṣi-pitṛ tarpaṇa*' or offering of libation to the gods, sages and ancestors with the recitation of the prescribed mantras in the manner laid down in the sacred texts with the mantra '*Tryambakam yajāmahe sugandhiṁ rayipoṣaṇaṁ*'. Another bath is given to the Shivarātri deities (Shiva, Vaṭukanātha etc.). A little water and grains of rice are held in the hollow of the palm of the left hand and waved at the images of the deities and then thrown backwards over the left shoulder with the words:

> '*Bhagavate Bhavāya devāya, Pārvatī sahitāya Parmeśwarāya Śivarātri devatābhyaḥ ārātrikā parikalpayāmi namaḥ.*
>
> ['Om, salutation to God Bhava, salutation to Parameśwara along with Pāravati; salutation to the deities of Shivaratri. I offer *ārātritikā*.']

Now begins the Pūjā of the main deities. The worshipper takes a little water from the image of Shiva with his thumb and index fingers and then rubs it on his eyes, reciting:

> '*Bhavāya devāya Umā sahitāya Śivāya Pārvatī sahitāya Parameśvarāya netra - sparṣnanaṁ namaḥ.*"[12]
>
> ['Salutation to God Bhava, to Shiva along with Uma, to Parameshwara along with Parvati. I undertake to touch my eyes.']

Or simply, '*Śivarātriyāga devatābhyo netrasparśanaṁ parigrhaṇāmi namaḥ*'. ('Salutation to the deities of Shivarātri worship. I undertake to touch my eyes').

After this, following the procedure, the seat (*āsana*) is offered to the deities by strewing some flowers and uttering:

> '*āsānaya namaḥ vṛṣabhāsanāya namaḥ /śatadala padmāsanāya namaḥ, sahasradala padmāsanāya namaḥ*'//[13]
>
> ('Salutation to the seat; salutation to the *vṛṣabha* seat; salutation to the hundred – petaled lotus – shaped seat; salutation to the thousand – petaled lotus – shaped seat.')

The images of the deities are worshipped reciting the '*Śiva Mahimnāpāra*' and other hymns. Then garment and the sacred thread are offered to the deities in the

form of flowers with the mantras '*Śivarātri devatābhyaḥ vastraṁ parikalpayāmi namaḥ*' and '*Śivarātri devatābhyaḥ yajñopavītaṁ parikalpayāmi namaḥ*'.[14] ('Salutation, to the deities of Shivarātri, I offer garments' and 'Salutation to the deities of Shivarātri, I offer the sacred thread). Or alternately,

> '*Kālāgni Rudraḥ sarvajña varadābhaya dāyaka vastraṁ grahaṇa devaśe devyai vastra śobhitaṁ / samasta Śivarātri devatābhyaḥ vastraṁ parikalpayāmi namaḥ*"//[15]
>
> ["I offer garment to Rudra who assumes the form of *kālāgni* (the fire that destroys everything at the end of time); who grants boons and protection; I offer garment to adorn the Goddess; I offer garment to all the deities of Shivarātri. Salutation!"]

In a similar manner fragrant materials, incense, flowers, *ratnadīpa* (a five-wick lamp) and camphor are offered to Shiva, Vaṭukanātha, and other Shivarātri deities represented by earthen images, reciting appropriate mantras. Other features of the Pūjā include waving of the *cāmara* (fly-whisk) over the divinities, holding a flower parasol over them, showing the mirror to them, offering them milk and loaf-sugar (which are dropped in the pitcher representing the Vaṭuka) and finally betel leaf with catechu nuts and cardamoms. Hymns addressed to Shiva are recited as flowers are showered on his and Vaṭukanātha's images. Thereafter *dakṣiṇā* is given by the patron of the Pūjā to the priest who is performing it on his behalf. Flowers are then offered to Vaṭukanātha with the verse '*Nāthaṁ nāthaṁ Tribhuvananāthaṁ bhītisitaṁ triṇayanaṁ triśūladharaṁ / kṛta bhogīnām indukalā, śekharaṁ*'.[16]

Fire Ritual

The next important step in the Pūjā is the fire sacrifice which is performed according to the usually prescribed procedure. *Vyāhṛtis* are recited, Gāyatrī is meditated upon and worshipped with the usual mantras and oblations are made into the sacred fire. The *praṇītā pātra* containing *viṣṭara,* rice-grains, flowers and water is kept to the north-east of the *agni-kuṇḍa* and sesame seeds are thrown into that vessel as well as the sacred fire. Two blades of *darbha* grass are burnt and thrown towards the right. Water from the *praṇīta pātra* is sprinkled nine times into the fire after performing *prāṇāyāma* with the mantras '*satyaṁ tvartena parisamūhyāmi*'. Four blades of *darbha* grass with east and north–pointing ends

are thrown around the fire in all the four directions. Offerings are made into the fire of *darbha* blades, barley grains, sesame, ghee, curds, and *pañcāmṛta* or the five ambrosias. Then contemplating upon '*mahojjvalaṁ vedeśwarīṁ pañcamukhī*', the dazzling five-faced mistress of the Vedas, Gāyatrī, offerings are made into the sacred fire reciting the *mahāvyāhṛtis* and other related Vedic mantras.

Shivarātri itself is considered an embodied goddess and is offered oblations with great reverence:

> '*Prāpannohaṁ Śivaṁ rātriṁ bhadre paramaśimahi svāhā / kālarātryai svāhā tālarātryai svāha rājñīratryai svāhā Śivaratryai svāhā*' //[17]

The Puruṣa Sūkta is recited while presenting sacrificial offerings to Vishnu and the divinities of Pañcarātra worship. Shiva, Rudra, Sharva, Pashupati, Ugradeva, Mahadeva, Bhima Deva, Ishana, and also Parameshvara together with Parvati are offered oblations, and so are Ganapati, Surya and likewise the mother goddesses including the local Sharika, Sharada, Maharajñī Jwala, Brida, Vitasta as well as Vaikhari, Ganga Yamuna, Kalika, Siddhalakshmi, Mahatripurasundari, Abhayankari and Kshemankari. Herakaraja, Vaṭukaraja and other Bhairavas too receive the sacrificial offerings – in fact all the divinities described as "*Śivarātriyāga devatā*". The fire sacrifice is concluded in an interesting manner – the flame is diverted towards oneself and the Fire-god is requested to depart.

Naivedya or Sacrificial Food

Choice dishes of meat and fish are prepared by Kashmiri Pandits on Shivarātri and symbolically offered to Shiva and subsidiary deities as sacrificial food which is partaken of as *naivedya* by the worshipper and his family after the worship is over. A *Vaiśvadeva homa* is performed for this purpose and the cooked food is consecrated through mantras, sprinkling of water, *arghya* etc. to turn it into *naivedya* worthy of being offered to a divinity. The food thus transformed into *naivedya* is treated as *amṛta* or ambrosia and offered to the whole host of deities and attendant deities associated with Shivartri. It is then partaken of by the worshipper and his family as remnants left by these deities.

Spreading blades of *darbha* grass with east-pointing ends on the ground, sacrificial food is kept for offering to thirty-six divinities, placing three pieces of

bread, one upon the other, in a row for each of them. Then blades of south- pointing ends are strewn on the ground and sprinkled with water and sesame and on them food is offered to the maternal and paternal ancestors. The ancestors are invited one by one by name and offered the *naivedya,* milk, fruit, roots etc. They are propitiated with fragrant materials, incense, lamp, water for sipping etc. Portions of bread (called '*tsŏṭ*' in Kashmiri) are offered as *bali* to the *yoginīs* with the mantra: "Whosoever *yoginī* there is of terrible, pleasant or violent disposition, walking through the sky or on the earth, may she be always satisfied with me."[18]

The *bali* is not, however, limited to supernatural beings like the *yoginīs* only even though they are among its important recipients. It is offered to the humans and lower creatures as well. Even dogs, fallen beings, men addicted to sin, crows, insects, ants etc. are entitled to their share. With the sacred thread over the right shoulder, it is offered reciting the verses '*deva manuṣyo paśavā ... kecit apātraḥ pāpayonayaḥ*', meaning:

> "Those who are in need of food given by me, I offer this to them, be they *devas* or men, beasts or birds, *siddhas, yakshas,* dragons, or the host of demons, ghosts, spooks, or immovable trees.
>
> "The insects, ants, moths or other small creatures, whoever they be, who bound by karmic chains are suffering hunger and thirst, may they get all joy and satisfaction by this food scattered by me for them.
>
> "Those who have no father, no mother, nor friends, those who have no kitchen to cook their food therein, for their satisfaction and joy, I throw this food on earth. May they feel satisfied and happy."[19] [Trs. S.C. Vasu]

Bali of meat, rice, bread-cakes etc is specially offered according to Kaula rituals to the twelve Bhairavas starting with Vaṭukanatha in the east. The Bhairavas are invited by name, invoking them with their respective mantras and *dhyāna* (visualization).

The Vaṭuka Bhairava is imagined holding a noose, goad, small drum etc. in his hands, white in complexion and in a dancing posture. He has three eyes and a crescent moon adorns his forehead. He is invited with the following mantra, inducing him to accept the *bali:*

Om hrīṁ - śrīṁ Devīputra Vaṭukanātha Bhairava āgacca-āgaccha rakṣa - rakṣa / sugandhi - puṣpa dīpa -dhūpa - anna - piṣiṭādi kśetrapāla baliṁ gṛhāṇa - gṛhāṇa vauṣaṭ //[20]

Other Bhairavas are Bhūtabala (group of *bhūtas*) in the south-east, Agnivetālarāja in the south, west, Mangaleśwara in the north-west, Yoginībala (group of *yoginis*) in the north, Viśwakasena in the north-east, Jayaksena in the upper region, Tejeśa in the subterranean region and Caṇḍa in the middle region.[21]

After the *bali* offerings, the worshipper seeks permission of Shiva to partake of the remaining food as *naivedya*. He recites a hymn in praise of the deity pleading, "I do not know how to invoke, nor how to worship, nor how to bid thee farewell, pardon my delinquencies, O Lord." Finally, holding two blades of *darbha* in hand, the deities are requested to go back. The worshipper places a few flowers on the *kalaśa* and sprinkles a little water from it on himself and his family, reciting verses for his well-being. In fact, it is the officiating priest who performs ail the Pūjā for his patron (*yajamāna*). In the end, he takes out a few walnuts from the *kalaśa* and gives them as *prasāda* to the patron and his family, showering his blessings on them.

Other Ritual Aspects

The Shivarātri Pūjā has several other aspects which are quite interesting and significant in the ritualistic context. It would be relevant to examine some of them.

(a) Observance of Fast on Trayodaśī and Partaking of the Sacrificial Food

As said earlier, the worshipper and his family are enjoined to observe a fast on the *trayodaśī* day till the Pūjā and the fire-sacrifice are over. But it is essential for everyone to partake of the sacrificial food after symbolically offering it to the divinities governing the ritual. Those who do so are supposed to achieve progress and prosperity in life and have all their wishes fulfilled. But those who do not partake of the sacrificial food and do not break their fast after the Pūjā and sacrificial ceremony are bound to go to hell or take rebirth as lowly animals besides facing all kinds of disappointments in life, according to the relevant texts. While preparation of dishes of meat and fish are recommended in Kashmiri Tantric texts, as Shivarātri is basically a festival for appeasing Bhairavas and Yoginis, the option

to prepare only vegetarian dishes is also there and is an essential feature for certain sects like the Guriṭs. For those who partake of the sacrificial food on Shivarātri, the Sūryārṇava says:

Matsyair maṁsair modakaiśca vaṭakair varvaras tathā /
kāmāyaṁ pujayed - rātraṁ bhairavān parvamadṛtaḥ /
kṣetreśān pujayet tatra sarvān kāmān avāpnuyāt //[22]

["He who worships *bhairavas* and the *kṣetrapālas* on the night of *trayodaśī* with great reverence, offering fish and meat dishes as well as *laddoos* as sacrificial food, has all his wishes fulfilled."]

The Harihara Vāsara Vinoda also prescribes offering of meat dishes, and so does the Bhringīsh Saṁhitā. For one who does not partake of the sacrificial food after the worship is over, the Shiva Saṁhitā has this to say :

Yo yāgotsavaṁ ulanghya ṭisṭhet nirāśano vrato /

Jivānsa paśutameti mṛto miryamāpnuyāt //[23]

['He who does not partake of the sacrificial food after completion of the sacrificial ceremony is like an animal and goes to hell after death.']

(b) The Earthen Images

As we have seen, an earthen pitcher filled with water and walnuts is worshipped as the Vaṭuka Bhairava in Shivarātri Pūjā. Two earthen images called *vāgur* and *sanipŏtul* are also offered worship as Shiva. Another rather large earthen vessel called *rishi* possibly represents Pārvatī or Mahādevī, while four small earthen vessels represent the group of *yoginīs* and *kṣetrapālas*. The *vāgur* has the shape of an open-mouthed vessel having three distinct parts and, according to Shri B.N. Gurtoo, a ritual specialist with whom I discussed the symbolism of these clay images, it represents Shiva shown in the process of *unmeṣa* or manifestation. However, the etymology of most of these anicons is not clear as no one has cared to throw any significant light on it. The *sani pŏtul*, about which some most ridiculous etymologies have been floated, is an image representing five-faced Shiva on which water is sprinkled. The *vāgur* (Vyāghreśwara?) is specially worshipped on the *dvādaśī* night itself, the writer of the manual giving injunctions about the Pūjā directs that it should be done according to the rites of the Kaula cult. Neither

he, nor any other ritualist, however, has explained what these rites are but has only indicated they are related to *Bhairava Pūjā*: *"atha dvadaśyāṁ pūjanaṁ Bhairavānāṁ namāmi,"*[24] without elaborating. Cooked food is kept in an earthen vessel called *ḍulij* on this day in the belief that it augurs well for the Shivarātri falling on the next day. The aniconic images, nonetheless, are essential to the performance of the ritual activity. A full and clear picture about their symbolism is still to emerge. Yet it can be said that as the vessels are not made on the potter's wheel, their worship may well have originated in an early period.

(c) Śiva Caturdaśī – the Day of Feasting

This should make clear the difference between Shivarātri as it is celebrated by the Pandits of Kashmir and by Hindus of other parts of the country. The Pandits not only celebrate it one day earlier but also perform quite different rituals. Further, the tradition among Hindus in general is to observe a strict fast throughout the Shiva Chaturdashi day, or the 14th day of the dark fortnight of Phalguna. Even taking of fruit or betel leaf is considered as a violation of the fast. It is clearly stated in the Padma Purāṇa that "a fast should be observed on the Shiva Chaturdashi day and not even fruit should be taken": *"Śivayāga caturdaśyāṁ, mā vrate phala bhojanaṁ."*[25] The Mārkanḍeya Purāṇa goes a step further and adds: *"tambūlaṁ api na dadyāt vrata bhanga bhayaṁ priye,"*[26] meaning that not even a betel leaf should be taken for fear of violating the vow. But *caturdaśī* on the other hand is the day of feasting and not fasting for the Kashmiri Brahmins. The festival ends for them only on the *amāvasyā* or the last day of the dark fortnight of the month.

(d) The Walnuts and the Worship

As we have, said earlier, a pitcher filled with water and walnuts represents the Vaṭuka Bhairava and the ritual of his worship is called '*vaṭuk barun*' in Kashmiri. The mantras associated with the worship present a curious blend of Vedic and Tantric elements, Vaṭuka being described in them as *devīputra* or the "Son of the Goddess", and one of the deities guarding the eastern quarter. While the legend we have narrated about the celebration of *herath* on *trayodaśi* of the dark half of Phalguna pointing to his birth from a pitcher full of water explains why an earthen pitcher is shown to represent him, no light has been shed in any sacred text about the significance of

walnuts. But they feature in several Kashmiri Hindu life-cycle as well as Pūjā rituals as an important ingredient. They are used in *zarakāsai* (first tonsure of boy), *mekhal* (sacred thread investiture), *kanyā saṁskāra,* marriage and even *antyeṣṭi* (the last rites). But on *herath* they constitute the most prominent ritual item, filling the Kalaśa with walnuts and water and distributing them both being regarded as significant ritual acts. But the significance and symbolism of walnuts is lost to ritualists of the community today who only carry on the tradition. Could it be because the kernel of the nut can be easily divided into four distinct parts representing the four *pusuṣārthas* or what the Hindus consider to be the four objects or goals of existence – *dharma* (discharge of duty), *artha* (acquirement of wealth), *kāma* (the gratification of desire) and *mokṣa* (the final emancipation)? At least that is what appears to me to be the case. Anyhow, on the *amāvasyā* (last day of the dark fortnight of a lunar month) the festivities of Shivarātri come to an end with the distribution of the soaked walnuts among relatives and friends as *naivedya*. Before distribution, the *vaṭuk* (the pitcher containing the walnuts) is taken to a river or a water tap for cleaning and removal of Pūjā materials, (flower petals etc.) The ceremony is called '*vaṭuk parmārzun*' the word '*parmārzun*' having been derived from Sanskrit '*pramārjana*', which means 'wiping off, 'rubbing off, and the day on which the *vaṭuk* is cleared of Pūjā stains and walnuts are distributed is called '*ḍūny māvas*' the word '*ḍūny*' meaning 'walnuts' in Kashmiri. The walnuts are distributed with *roṭis* of rice flour, generally after a brief Pūjā, up to the tenth day of the bright half of the next lunar month.

(e) The Generosity of Rāma Bhairava

Shivaratri celebrations of Kashmiri Hindus conclude on an interesting note. The '*vaṭuk*' is carried back from the river after 'cleaning' but the members of the family carrying it find the entrance door of the house bolted from inside by the women of the family. An amusing bit of conversation takes place between the two groups before the women open the door:

"Dub-dub"

"Knock ! knock!"

"Kus chhuva?"

"Who is there?"

"Rāma bror."

"It is me, Rāma Bhaṭṭārka."

"Kyā hyath?"

"What have you brought for us?"

"Annâ hyath, danâ hyath, gury-gupan ta orzū."

"I have brought food, and wealth and cattle and good health for you all."

"Cān- myān ta ṭini hāhā."

"And also the prattle of new born babies!"

The "Rāma Bror" who features in the above conversation is none else than Rāma or Ramaṇa Bhairava, the mind-born son of Mahadevi who emerged from a pitcher of water, as did Vaṭuka Bhairava. As we shall recall, he was assured by the Goddess that he would receive his due share of worship after Vaṭuka. The beneficent role assigned to him, as described above, adds a happy folk-colour to the Shivarātri Pūjā. Unfortunately, hardly anyone among the Pandits knows about it today, taking the benign Bhairava to be a cat and ignorant of the fact that the word '*bror*' in the above context means 'a god' and is derived from Sanskrit '*bhaṭṭāraka*'. Sadly, this little bit of drama has been forgotten now and has become a thing of the past.

2. Pārthiveśvara Pūjā

(i) History and Legend

From the above discussion of Shivarātri Pūjā, and our earlier description of the daily Sandhyā rites, emerges a kind of definite pattern of worship that is basic to almost all the Pūjā rituals of Kashmiri Hindus with a few variations here and there. We can see this in the Parthiveśvara Pūjā (called *Parthīśar* in Kashmiri) also, which is both a ritual and an art and was quite popular in Kashmir till some years back. The worship is by no means exclusive to Kashmir, however, and is performed by Hindus in other parts of the country as well. But in Kashmir it is said to have gained quite a popularity during the Muslim rule when temple worship had become a risk for the Hindus and could not be performed due to difficult political conditions. That was a time when temples and Shivalayas could not be visited by them for fear of

being identified as Hindus and getting killed, so individual worship became a universal practice among Kashmiri Hindus. Making an instant *Shivalinga* and images of his entourage comprising Parvati, Kumara, Ganapati, and the Ekādaśa (eleven) Rudras, and worshipping them at home caught their imagination. It came handy to them as these images could easily be consigned to the river after worship without attracting attention.

At a later stage, when the Dogras came to rule Kashmir, the threat of religious persecution receded and conditions became more conducive, the Pūjā became more elaborate and evolved into a traditional ritual art. Gradually it almost became a daily practice with some, while others performed it on special occasions like the Śravaṇa Pūrṇimā and the Somāvatī Amāvasyā or *amāvasyā* falling on a Monday. As time passed on, priests were engaged to prepare the images, which swelled to as many as one hundred and eleven *Shivalingas* alone, and officiate during the Pūjā on behalf of a patron.

(ii) Making the Linga

The *linga* and the other images are to be made from only pure clay obtained from a *devasthāna* (a place of worship), sacred places or hillsides. In Srinagar, people would rush to the Shankaracharya Temple on the Shrāvaṇa Pūrṇimā day and while returning from the worship of the Shivalinga atop the hill, they would dig clay from different places on it. According to the religious rules laid down in this regard, the images should be made of fine clay which is not black and is without sand or grass or pebbles. This clay is pulverized and given the shape of a *linga* and other smaller images by the worshipper, the act itself being regarded as imbued with religious merit. For kneading the clay properly, water, milk, yogurt and ghee are generally used. The *linga* is liberally pasted with ghee so that the water poured over it during the Pūjā does not make the clay run-off or damage or deform the *linga*. A hole is made at the top of the *linga* and mercury, also known as *haribīja,* is put into it, and then the hole is hermetically sealed.

(iii) The Symbolism

The clay or earth used to prepare the images is one of the five elements or *pañca-mahābhutas*. It is solid, can be felt and cast into any shape. Life sprouts

from it, stands on it and is nourished by it, and finally returns to it, representing the three stages of procreation or birth, sustenance and dissolution or death. It stands for the *triguṇātmaka* Shiva in the *linga* form, the mercury or *haribīja* being the seed of life.

(iv) The Pūjā

The *linga* is installed on a *bhadrapīṭha* made of wood at the *dhyāna-mudrā* height, corresponding to the height at which worshipper's eyes can be fixed on the *linga* without strain. It has a *praṇālī* at the base as a channel for draining away the water poured over it. Following the usual sequence of Kashmiri Pūjā rituals, the worship starts with *kalaśa pūjā,* a *kalaśa* with water being placed on an eight-petalled lotus drawn in the north-eastern direction. Keeping the *praṇīta-pātra* towards the south-west, flowers and *akṣat* are placed on the *kalaśa* and the hymn '*Omkāro yasya mūlaṁ*' recited and the Goddess Gayatri invoked and meditated upon. The *kalaśa pūjana* is a long and elaborate process in itself and the *kalaśa* is considered to be the abode of all the gods. Obeisance is paid and reverence is shown to them, offering a series of *upacāra* services in a definite order.

After *kalaśa pūjana,* the worshipper installs the Pārthiveśvara on a *bhadrapīṭha* and, sprinkling a little water on it recites the *āsana-śodhana* mantra to consecrate it. "Of the *āsana-śodhana* mantra, Meruprṣhṭha is the seer, Sutalaṁ is the metre and Kūrma is the *devatā".* Having recited the mantra, he touches his head with his hand uttering *"Meruprṣṭha ṛṣhaye namaḥ"* ("I bow to Meruprṣṭha *Ṛṣi*"), then with the words *"Sutalaṁ chandase namaḥ"* ("I bow to the *Sutalaṁ* metre"), he touches his face with the words *"Kūrmo devatāya namaḥ"* ("I bow to Kurma Devata") his heart, with the words *"āsanaśodhane viniyogāya namaḥ"* all the parts of his body. Then strewing two blades of *dharbha* grass on the ground, he recites, "O Earth, all creatures are upheld by thee; O Devi, thou art supported by Vishnu; O shining One, support me and sanctify my seat." This is followed by *kara - nyāsa* and *aṅga - nyāsa* in which the worshipper imposes different parts of the Gayatri mantra first on his fingers and then on different parts of his body in order to purify them so that he is capable of performing the subsequent rites of the Pūjā. Uttering the mantra '*apasarantu te bhūtā*', he scatters sesame seeds all around so as to drive away evil spirits. This being done, the worshipper performs *prāṇāyāma,* wears

pavitraka (a ring of *kusha.* grass) in his ring finger, ties the *närivan* (protection cord) on his wrist, and recites the prescribed mantras to purify his own self, the ritual materials and the sun.[27]

Declaring his resolve to perform the Pūjā of Parthiveśvara, the worshipper seeks permission of the deities governing it for it : "I seek the permission to perform the worship of Parthiveśvara to seek redemption from the sins which I may have acquired through speech mind and body." The deities to whom this is addressed and obeisance is made include Ganesha, Kumāra, Shrī, Saraswatī, Lakshmī, Vishvakarmā, 'Deities of the. Entrance Door', Prajāpati, Brahman, 'Deities presiding over the Kalasha', the Brahmā-Vishṇu-Maheshvara triumvirate, the four Vedas, Nārayaṇa, Govinda, Durgā, Tryambaka, Shatarudras, Mahamrityuyanjaya Bhaṭṭāraka and others. Obesiance is also made to the goddess Amā, Kāmā, Charvangī, Ṭankadhāriṇī, Tārā, Pārvatī, Yakṣiṇī, Śārikā, Śāradā, Mahārajñī, Jwālā, Bhavānī with One Thousand Names, Abhayankarī, Kṣemaṅkarī and Sarvaśatrughātinī, besides the Bhairavas Heraka, Vaṭuka etc.[28] *Āsana* or seat is offered to these divinities also. They are all invoked for their presence at the Pūjā site. Shiva is meditated upon with the *dhyāna mantra* '*śuddha-sphaṭika-sankāśam*'. He is invoked with the words; *"āgaccha Mṛtyuyañjaya Candramaule vyāgrājin alankṛta Śūlapāṇe / subhakta - sanrakṣaṇa - kalpavṛkṣa prasīda sarveśvara pārthiveśa"//*[29] ("Come thou O Lord, who is the conqueror of Death, and is crowned with the moon, who is adorned with tiger-skin and holds a trident in his hand. Be pleased, O Parthiveśa, the Lord of All, the boon-granting tree and protector of good devotees of thine.") The worshiper summons Shiva praying to him to enter the clay *linga* and remain present in it to accept the Pūjā. He invokes Ganesha, Kumāra and Durgā in a similar manner. He then offers a series of *upacāras* or worship services to Shiva and the subsidiary deities, beginning with *pādya* or water for washing feet. The services are accompanied by the prescribed mantras. The *pādya* offered to the *linga* and other images consists of water containing parched grains (*lājā*), saffron paste (*kuṁkuma*), different herbs (*sarvauṣadhi*) and shoots of *darbha* grass (*darbhānkurā*). *Pādya* is offered to the other divinities mentioned above also. After *pādya, arghya* or sanctified water containing eight ingredients – milk, shoots of the *kuśa* grass (*viṣṭhara*), ghee, curds, rice-gains, barley and sesame seeds – is offered to all these deities, reciting different mantras. Then water for rinsing the

mouth (*ācamanīya*) is offered. After that *mantra - snāna* (bath sanctified with mantras) is offered, the deities being bathed with water and twenty other ingredients – milk, curds, ghee, honey, parched grains, mustard seeds, sesamum seeds, barley grains, unhusked rice, *viṣṭara* shoots, *dūrva* shoots, mud, ashes, fruit, candy sugar, the five ambrosias, the five products of the cow, camphor, fragrant materials and flowers. It may be noted that the *pañcāmṛta, pañcagavya,* and several other ingredients have many things in common, the actual number of ingredients being much less than the twenty-one listed for the bath. Shiva is yet again bathed with fifteen ingredients which include "gold and gems" besides water, milk, curds, ghee, honey, candy sugar, herbs, grains of unhusked rice, flowers, fruit, mustard seeds, parched grains and fragrant materials (saffron paste) which this bath has in common with the twenty-one ingredients described above. Each ingredient is put into water, reciting related mantras. Ganesha is given a fourteen-ingredient bath (*caturdaśa-snānāni*), Kumara a six-ingredient bath (*ṣaṣṭa-snānāni*), the Goddess an eight-ingredient bath (*aṣṭa-snānāni*).

The next step in the Pārthiveśvara Pūjā is *tarpaṇa* or offering of water to satisfy the gods. Pārthiveśvara (Shiva) is offered water poured through hollowed hands, and a flower which is placed on the head (top of the *linga*). Then, the following mantra is recited as the libation is made: *"Om namaḥ Śivāya Śivaṁ tarpayāmi namaḥ / Śaśi Śekharāya namaḥ / Śaśi Śekharaṁ tarpayāmi namaḥ / Om Śaṅkarāya namaḥ Śaṅkaraṁ etc. / Bhavāya devāya bhavam/ Ugrāya deyāya ugram devam / Mṛdāya devāya mṛdam devam/ Harāya Haram/ Viśvarūpāya viśvarūpaṁ/ Kapardine Kapardinaṁ/ Tryambakāya Tryambakaṁ/ Om Mṛtyuyañjaya bhaṭṭārkāya namaḥ / Om Mṛtyuyañjaya bhaṭṭārakaṁ tarpayāmi namaḥ //*[30]

After the gods, the *ṛṣis* and *pitaras* are offered three libations of water each.

Holding water and *akṣata* (grains of rice) in the hollow of the hand, and tossing these over his left shoulder, the worshipper performs *ālath* or *āratī* of *Pārthiveśvara* and other deities. The water with which the *linga* is bathed is touched to the eyes. The Pārthiveśvara is then anointed (*anulepana*) and offered garment and the sacred thread after reciting the *Mahimnāpāra*. hymn. All these ritual activities, it must be noted, are performed with recitation of specifically prescribed mantras. The next step viz. offering of *argha* and flowers is a unique feature of the Pūjā. Seven layers *of argha* and flowers, called *"āvaraṇas"*, are offered to Pārthiveśvara and Shiva's

entourage. The first *āvaraṇa* is offered to Shiva in his various forms with the mantras,

> *"Bhavāya devāya kṣitimūrtaye namaḥ / Śarvāya devāya jalamūrtaye namaḥ / Rudrāya devāya tejomūrtaye namaḥ / Paśupataye devāya vāyumūrtaye / Ugrāya devāya akāśa mūrtaye / Mahādevāya sūrya mūrtaye / Bhīmāya devāya soma mūrtaye / Iśānāya devāya yajamāna mūrtaye namaḥ. Om abhiṣṭasiddhiṁ me dehi śaraṇāgatavatsala / bhaktyā samarpaye tubhyaṁ prathama varṇācchanaṁ //"*[31]
>
> ["Salutation to Bhava in his manifestation as the earth. Salutation to Śarva in his manifestation as water. Salutation to Rudra in his manifestation as brilliance. Salutation to Paśupati in his manifestation as air. Salutation to Ugra in his manifestation as they sky. Salutation to Māhadeva in his manifestation as the sun. Salutation to Bhīmadeva in his manifestation as the moon. Salutation to Īśāna in his manifestation as the *yajamāna*. O Lord, thou art loving towards those who seek thy protection, grant me my cherished wish, I am offering you this first layer of worship."]

The second *āvaraṇa* is offered to Shiva as Ananta, Sūkṣma, Śivottama, Ekarudra (one of the eight forms of Vidyeśvara), Ekanetra (another form of Vidyeśvara), Trimūrti (Brahmā – Viśṇu – Śiva triumvirate), Śrīkaṇṭha and Śikhaṇdin. The third *āvaraṇa* is offered to Nandinī, Mahākāla, Vriṣabha, Bhringīśa, Kumāra and Ambikā with their respective seed syllables (*bīja-mantras*). The fourth *āvarṇa* is offered to Indra, Agni, Yama, Nṛriti, Varuṇa, Vāyu, Kubera, Īśāna, Brahmā and Viṣṇu, uttering their respective seed - syllables '*laṁ*', '*raṁ*', '*saṁ*', '*kṣaṁ*', '*vaṁ*', '*kaṁ*', '*iṁ*', '*braṁ*' and '*aṁ*', the fifth to the combinations of Agni – Āditya, Varuṇa - Candra, Kumāra - Bhauma, Viṣṇu - Buddha, Indra - Bṛhaspati, Saraswatī - Śukra, Prajāpati - Śaniścara, Gaṇapati - Rāhu, Rudra - Ketu, Brahmā - Dhruva, and Ananta - Agastya; the sixth to the Nāgas Ananta, Vāsukī, Padma, Mahāpadma, Takṣaka, Śaṅkhapāla, Kārkoṭa and Kulika. The seventh *āvaraṇa* or layer of *argha* is offered to the *ayudhas* or weapons of the gods with the syllables '*phaṭ namaḥ*' added at the end. Thus the seven layers are offered to Shiva, his family, his entourage and the weapons and vehicles of the subsidiary deities.

The other *upcāras* consist of offering flowers (*puṣpa*), incense (*dhūpa*), five-wick lamp (*ratnadīpa*) and camphor (*karpūra*) to the deities of the Pārthiveśvara

Pūjā. *Cāmara* (waving of the chowric or fly-whisk) is offered next with three hymns addressed to Shiva. A flower–bedecked parasol (*chatra*) is held over the Pārthiveśvara, followed by holding the mirror (*ādarsha*). Milk and loaf-sugar and betel leaf are offered at the end to complete the *upacāras* (offerings). The worshipper then makes an offering of flowers to the *linga* and other images of the Pārthiveśvara and makes half a *pradakṣiṇā* requesting Shiva to be pleased. He then prostrates before the deities with eight parts of his body touching the ground (*aṣṭāṅga prāṇama*). He asks Shiva's forgiveness for any shortcomings in the worship. Giving *dakṣiṇā* to the officiating priest and once again offering flowers to Pārthiveśvara (the clay *linga* of Shiva), he recites the *vyāhṛtis* in the manner already described in the context of Sandhyā. A *vaiśvadeva* is performed to consecrate the food offered to the deities as in Shivarātri Pūjā. Permission is sought of the deities to partake of it as *naivedya*. The officiating priest sprinkles a little water from the *kalaśa* on the worshipper and his family and concludes the Pūjā giving them walnuts and flowers.

3. Viṣṇupañcāyatana Pūjā

Viṣṇupañcāyatana Pūjana or worship of the images of the five principal gods of the Hindu pantheon: Viṣhṇu, Shiva, Ganesha, Sūrya and Durga, was one of the popular Pūjās current among Kashmiri Hindus till recently. The Pūjā shows that despite sectarian leanings a common Kashmiri Hindu worshipped other gods of the pentad also in a spirit of perfect accommodation and devotion. The main feature of the Pūjā is that the image of the chosen deity was placed in the centre while images of other deities were also worshipped along side of it in a specific order. No two Shiva *linga*s, three Ganesha icons, three Durga idols, two "Dwaraka Chakras", two Sun-god images and two conches should be worshipped together, according to the rules laid down in the concerned religious texts. The number *of śāligrāmas* (roundish black stones considered to represent Viṣhṇu) should be even, these rules say, but it should not be two, and not odding except, one.[32] The Pūjā is performed usually in the temples but can also be performed at home. In fact it was this kind of worship that was generally performed in the *ṭhokur kuṭh* or Pūjā room by the people. The basic ritualistic procedure for this Pūjā is mainly that of the *ṣoḍaśa-upacāra-pūjā* with a few variations and modifications at some places. This includes preliminaries

and the main Pūjā, the central deity being worshipped first followed by other deities of the Pañcāyatana. Thus if Vishnu is the central deity, the order of worshipping the other deities is Shiva at number two, Ganesha at number three, Surya at number four and Devi (Durga) at number five; if Shiva is the central deity the order of worshipping the other deities is : Vishnu, Surya. Ganesha and Devi; if Ganesha is the central deity, the order of worshipping. the other deities is : Vishnu, Shiva, Surya and Devi; if Surya is the central deity, the order of worshipping the other deities is : Shiva, Ganesha, Vishnu and Devi; and if Devi is the central deity, the order of worshipping the other deities is: Vishnu, Shiva, Ganesha and Surya.[33]

Unlike Shivaratri or Pārthiveśvara Pūjā, Vishṇu Pañcāyatana does not start with *kalaśa pūjana* but straightaway with the purification of the seat of the worshipper by reciting the *āsana śodhana mantra*. The purification process includes the familiar hymn addressed to Pṛthvi, the Earth goddess, starting with '*pṛthvī tvayā dhṛtā loke*' in which obeisance is paid to her and she is requested to be pleased with the worship. This is followed by *namaskāra* (salutation) to Ganesha with the prayer to remove all obstacles. Then the worshipper pays homage to the Guru equating him with the holy triad Brahmā, Vishṇu and Mahesha and even with the Supreme Brahmana (*akhanḍa manḍalākāraṁ vyāpta yena carācaraṁ*'). Holding two blades of the *darbha* grass in hand, the worshipper performs an initial Gayatri *nyāsa,* imposing the Gayatri mantra on various parts of the body. Then follows a feature unique to the Vishṇu Pañcāyatana Pūjā – a *ṣodaṣāṅga nyāsa* consigning sixteen parts of the body to the sixteen verses of the Puruṣa Sūkta. Yet another *nyāsa* is performed through which different parts of five mantras of the Pancāyatana deities (*tad viṣṇoḥ paramaṁ padamṁ*', '*yo Rudra Agnau*', '*gaṇāṇām tvā Gaṇapatiṁ*' etc.) are imposed on different parts of the body. After these three long *nyāsas* in a row, the worshipper takes other steps preparatory to the main Pūjā. He takes a little sanctified water in his hand and sprinkles it on his heart (chest) and face, construing it as a *tīrtha snāna* (sacred bath at a place of pilgrimage). Wearing a *pavitraka* in his ring finger, he applies a saffron *tilaka* to his own forehead and then consecrates the Pūjā objects, the lamp and the incense, and also the sun by offering *akṣata* (grains of rice), *tilaka* and flowers. Thus purifying himself, he pours water from the *praṇīta pātra* (vessel for pouring holy water) on the *śāligrāma*. He then utters the day, date, fortnight and name of the month of the performance of the Pūja, and

also of the *māsapati* or the deity governing that particular month with his mantra. Moving on to the next step, he offers libations of water and sesame seeds to his paternal and maternal ancestors. Then reciting the prescribed mantra he establishes life- breath (*jivādāna*) in the Pañcāyatana deities.

Tossing sesame and mustard seeds and barley grains over his shoulders, the worshiper places two blades of *darbha* grass for each of the main and subsidiary deities associated with the Pūjā on the floor to offer *āsana* (seat) to them, taking their names one by one:

Bhagavataḥ māsapater Nārāyaṇasya *idaṁ āsanaṁ namaḥ*
Bhagavataḥ Vāsudevasya *idaṁ āsanaṁ namaḥ*
Bhagavataḥ Bhavasya devasya *idaṁ āsanaṁ namaḥ*
Bhagavataḥ Vināyakasya *idaṁ āsanaṁ namaḥ*
Bhagavataḥ hrāṁ-hrīṁ-saḥ Sūryasya *idaṁ āsanaṁ namaḥ*
Bhagavatyāḥ Amāyaḥ *idaṁ āsanaṁ namaḥ*

Each of these mantras is repeated eight times.

The next step is invocation of the Pañcāyatana deities. Hymns praising Vishnu's divine majesty and his glory are recited, summoning him to enter his image. Similarly Shiva, Ganesha, Surya and Devi's presence in their respective images is invoked reciting their respective mantras and hymns. The deities are requested to accept the worshipper's "mental worship" (*grihāna mānasīṁ pūjāṁ*). Placing flowers on the images of the deities, the worshipper recites the Gayatri mantra thrice and then with the mantras '*śannodevīr abhisṭāye*' and '*bhagavantaḥ pādyaṁ pādyaṁ*' water for washing the feet is offered to each of them. Then with the Vedic mantras '*tripadūrdhvaṁ*' '*āpohiṣṭha*' etc. sacred water (*arghya*) is offered to them. Water for rinsing the mouth (*acamanīya*) is offered to the deities. After offering *mantra - snāna* (bath with mantras), bath with twenty-one ingredients (described earlier) is offered to the Pañcayātana deities, different mantras being recited for each ingredient. Vishnu is then offered another bath with sixteen ingredients (*ṣodaśa-snānaṁ*). These are: water, milk, curds, honey, barley, candy sugar, mustard seeds, sesame seeds, gold, camphor, saffron, ears of paddy, kernels of walnuts, flowers and different herbs. The Puruṣa Sūkta is once again recited and also 19 verses of the Lakṣhmī Sūkta from '*hiraṇya varṇaṁ ekena*' to '*hiraṇya*

varṇaṁ hariṇyīṁ' pouring water on Vishnu's image with a conch shell.[35]

Shiva is offered a fifteen-ingredient bath reciting the prescribed mantras with every ingredient. Vedic hymns are recited in praise of the deity (Rudra). Ganesha is offered a fourteen-ingredient bath, the ingredients being water, parched grains (*lāja*), five products of the cow (*pañcagavya*), sandal-paste and other fragrant materials, spikes of paddy, camphor, mustard seeds, milk, honey, gold, red flowers, different herbs, fruits, and sugar cane, reciting mantras and hymns addressed to him. Surya is offered a bath with thirteen ingredients and the Devi with eight, their respective mantras being recited with each ingredient.

The bell (*ghaṇṭā*), treated as a messenger of the gods and a goddess itself, also has its share of baths: '*devadūtyai ghaṇṭā bhagvatyai snāṇam namaḥ*'.[36] Thereafter libations of water mixed with curds, rice-grains, ghee and honey are offered to the gods, sages and ancestors (*deva - ṛshi - pitṛ tarpaṇa*) – a common feature of the Pūjās. The offerings are made on the *bhadrapīṭha* itself. Water is offered to "all the creatures of water, the earth and air." A thought is spared for those ancestors too who may be suffering torments in hell, alone without wife or son. They are offered water and sesame seeds (*tilodakaṁ*) to satisfy them. "May the whole animate and inanimate universe from the abode of Brahma to the humblest tuft of grass be satisfied by water offered by me", utters the worshipper, expecting to be rewarded with "wealth, fame and happiness, longevity and many sons" for his pains.

Ringing the bell (*ghaṇṭā*), the worshipper now offers another bath to the idol of Vishnu, pouring pure water over it with a conch shell. In a similar manner he bathes the images of the other deities of the Pañcāyatana too, but with a water-vessel (*praṇīta pātra*). He recites a cluster of mantras (*mantraguḍaka*) while performing this ceremony. He then touches each of the idols with the thumb and index finger of his right hand and then touches his eyes with them to perform '*netrasparśanaṁ*'. He then sips a little *caraṇāmṛta* from a copper vessel containing, water, a *tulasī* leaf, an image of the *cakra* (discus) and a little sandalwood paste for Vishnu. The idol of Vishnu is also placed in a copper vessel. In a similar manner he sips the *caraṇāmṛta* of Shiva and Devi whose images too are placed in the copper vessel. Mantras are recited and the bell is rung while performing this ceremony.

Now the Pañcāyatana images already placed on a precious *āsana* spread over

the *bhadrapīṭha* are offered *āsana* of flowers along with recitation of mantras, naming each deity one by one.

This is followed by the ceremonies of awakening and anointing the idols of the deities. Sprinkling water with *viṣṭara* on the idols, the deities are awakened one by one by name. They are entreated to wake up and confer happiness on the three worlds ('*trailokī mangalaṁ kuru*').[37] The Pañcāyatana deities are lifted one by one from the *bhadrapīṭha,* wiped clean with a towel and kept back in their respective seats after anointing them with saffron, sandalwood paste etc. The next *upacāra* (worship service) consists of offering garment and the sacred thread to them with their respective mantras. Vishnu is now offered only flowers and the other deities flowers with *akṣata* as *argha* : '*Śrī Viṣṇu pañcāyatana devatābhyo argho namaḥ puṣpaṁ namaḥ*'.

Sixteen verses of the Puruṣa Sūkta and twenty-one of Lakṣmī Sūkta are recited while worshipping Vishnu once again with flowers. Care is to be taken not to worship the image of Vishnu with *akṣat* and not to bathe it on *dvādaśi* or the twelth day of a lunar fortnight. This is called *dikpāla - pūjā* or worshipping the guardians of the quarters.[38] Along with Vishnu salutations are made to Vishnu's implements – the lotus flower that he caries in one of his hands, the plough and the pestle, the *kaustubha* gem that he wears around his neck, Jaya, Vijaya, Dhātri, Śeṣa, Garuḍa, Caṇḍa, Upacaṇḍa, Uttarāyaṇa, (the summer solstice) and Dakṣiṇāyaṇa (the winter solstice), the seven worlds, *bhūloka, bhuvaloka, svarloka, mahaloka, janaloka, japaloka* and *satyaloka* (earth, sky, heaven, middle region, place of re-births, place of the blest, and abode of truth), the four Vedas and the four ages (Kṛta, Treta, Dvāpara and Kali), the 'deity of the month', Nārāyaṇa, Vāsudeva and Govinda.

Similarly homage is paid to Shiva, Ganesha, Surya and Devi with their respective mantras.

Dhūpa or incense is offered next to the deities. The worshipper then stands up and offers the lamp, waving the *ratnadīpa* and *karpūra*. Waving the *cāmara* (fly-whisk) and ringing the bell, the *upcāra* of offering '*dhūpa-dīpa*' to the deities is completed and a mirror (*ādarśa*) is placed before them. Offering flowers to them, the worshipper now offers salutations (*praṇāma*) to each of the deities, reciting their respective mantras and hymns ('*tad Viṣṇoḥ paramaṁ padaṁ*' etc. for Vishnu, '*yo Rudro Agnau*' etc. for Shiva, '*gaṇānāṁ tvā*' etc, for Ganesha, '*citram devānāṁ*'. etc.

for Sūrya and '*jātavedase*' etc. for the Devi). This is known as '*puṣpa praṇāma*'.[39] This may be followed by *japa* (repetition of name of the deities). *Naivedya* or consecrated food is now offered to the Pañcāyatana deities according to the prescribed procedure, reciting the mantras '*amṛteśa mudrā*' etc. The last ceremony is that of *visarjana* which is performed with holding of two blades of *darbha* grass in hand and ringing of the bell. The worshipper utters the *visarjana* mantras, '*Om bhū puruṣaṁ visarjayāmi namaḥ*', '*Om bhuvaḥ puruṣaṁ visarjayāmi namaḥ*', '*Om svaḥ puruṣaṁ visarjayāmi namaḥ*', '*Om bhūr-bhuva-svaḥ puruṣaṁ visarjayāmi namaḥ*'.[40] ('*Om bhū* etc., I bid farewell to the deity'). Praying to the deities to depart, he seeks permission to partake of the *naivedya*. In the end continuing with hymns and mantras, he seeks forgiveness of the deities one by one for the sins he may have committed through speech, mind and body.

"I do not know how to invoke, nor how to worship, nor how to bid thee farewell, pardon my delinquencies, O Lord. Whatever shortcomings there may be in this Pūjā, whether defects of mantra, or defects of rituals, may all that be pardoned, O Lord." The Pūjā ends with a parting *sāstāṅga praṇāma* or prostration before the Pañcāyatana. Homage is again paid with flowers and hymns to the deities. *Naivedya* and *caraṇāmṛta* are distributed among their devotees. They are offered even to the ancestors as a libation.

4. Khĕtsimāvas or Yakshāmāvasyā

Khĕtismāvas is a distinctly Kashmiri festival celebrated on the *amāvasyā* or last day of the dark half of the month of Pausha (December-January). Commemorative of the coming together and commingling of the various races and ethnic groups in pre-historic Kashmir, the festival indicates that the cult of Yakṣa worship existed there from very early times. Yakṣas were an ancient Himalayan tribe whose name has been mentioned in the Ṛgveda and Atharvaveda. In post-Vedic literature we find the Ramayana, Mahabharata, Agnipurāna, Matsyapurāna, Brahmaṇḍapurāna, Vayupurāna replete with references to Yakṣas. Kashmir's Nilamata Purāna also confirms that the Yakṣas lived on the mountains surrounding the Valley. They would come down to the lower regions during the hard winter months, probably in search of food, and harass the aboriginal Nagas. To appease them, the inhabitants of the Valley would offer them food and other gifts.

Khetsimāvas appears to be a remnant of that practice, though later it acquired a religious colour and Yakṣas came to be regarded as superhuman and even semi-divine beings. Kubera, the mythical king of Yakṣas, is believed to be a close friend of Shiva and therefore it is supposed that as a religious group the Yakṣas were devotees of Shiva. There is a story in the Matsyapurāna that seems to confirm this. According to the story, the Yakṣa king Purnabhadra's son Harikesha was an ardent devotee of Shiva and he went to Kashi (Varanasi) to worship him. The *Nilamata Purāna* mentions six images of Kubera erected by sages.[41] There is little doubt therefore that Kubera was worshipped in ancient Kashmir as a friend of Shiva and as the god of wealth.

On *Khĕtsimāvas,* also known as *Yakshāmāvasyā,* Kubera, is worshipped by the Kashmiri Pandits, *khicharī* being cooked as a special offering to him in the evening and later partaken of as *naivedya.* Though *Khĕtsimāvas* appears to be more of a folk-religious festival, the worship performed on this day involves the different *upacāras* or steps of a typical Pūjā ritual. A pestle, or any round stone if that is not available, is washed and anointed with sandalwood paste and vermilion, taking it to be an image of Kubera. He is invoked to be present in the image and sprinkling water on it the rite of establishing life in it is performed with the mantras '*samvaḥ sṛjāmi hṛdayaṁ*' and '*aśinoḥ prāṇastau prāṇaṁ dattaṁ tena jīva*'. Holding two blades of the *darbha* grass and some grains of rice in hand, a sectarian variation of the Gayatri mantra is recited in his name, according to Pandit Prem Nath Shastri: '*yakṣanīśāya vidamahe gadāhasṭāya dhīmahi / tanno Kuberaḥ pracodayāt.*[42] But this appears to be a recent addition. *Āsana* or seat is offered to him typically by strewing two blades of *darbha* grass on the ground with the mantra, '*Bhagavataḥ. Kuberasya Tryaṁbaka - sakhāyasya yakṣeśwarāsaya dhanādhipasya idaṁ-āsanaṁ namaḥ*'.[43] ('Here is seat for the god Kubera, friend of Tryambaka, Lord of Yakṣas and giver of wealth'). After invocation, *pādya* or water for washing feet is offered to him with the mantra '*śannno devīr*' and sprinking water over his image, the words "*Bhagavate Kuberāya Trayambaka-sakhāya yakṣeśwarāya dhanādhipāya pādyaṁ namaḥ.*"[44] Similarly, incense, fragrant materials, lamp, *arghya* (sacred water with rice grains) and water for rinsing the mouth (*ācamanīya*') are offered to him. Food (*khicharī*) is offered to him with '*annaṁ namaḥ annaṁ namaḥ ājyaṁ - ājyaṁ*' and other *naivedya* mantras. A small portion of it is kept by the worshipper on the outer

wall of his house in the belief that Yakṣa will come to eat it. Folk imagination depicts him as wearing a cap which if taken away can make a person instantaneously rich. The *Yakṣāmāvasyā Pūjā* or *Khĕtsimāvas* thus has delightful elements of folk religion also.

5. *Navreh* – the Kashmiri New Year's Day

Kashmiri Pandits celebrate their new year's day on Chaitra *śukla pratipadā* or the first day of the bright half of the month of Chaitra (March – April) and call it Navreh. The word '*navreh*' is derived from Sanskrit '*nava varṣa*' meaning 'new year'. On the eve of Navreh, which falls on the last day of the dark fortnight of the month and is called 'Navreh Māvas', a *thālī* of unhusked rice with a bread, a cup of curds, a few walnuts, some cooked rice, a little salt, a silver coin, a pen-case and a pen, a mirror, some flowers and the new *pañcaṅga* (almanac) are kept and seen as the first thing on waking up in the *brāhma muhūrta* (wee hours). The *pañcānga,* called *necipatrī* in Kashmiri (<Skt. '*nakṣtra patrikā*'), is an almanac which gives astrological configurations and auspicious dates and other useful religious information for the new year. The Bhringīsh Saṁhitā gives detailed injunctions on the way to celebrate the *navarṣotsava* (Navreh festival) and says that the *thālī* should be of bronze (*kānsyapātraka*) and adds a *devamūrti* or an image of a god to the list of things mentioned above.[45] It also prescribes that the medicinal root '*vacha*' (*vai* in Kashmiri) should be chewed on this day early in the morning and also curds and fruit, as that is auspicious for the new year. Only then should one go to one's relatives or friends preferably with some fruit in hand, the *Samhitā* says, and eat something there also.[46] Not all these ordainments are followed today, but *thāl vuchhun* or seeing the *thālī* early in the morning is regarded as the quintessential ritual. The walnuts are given to every member of the family to be later thrown into the river.

It may be noted that the custom of seeking the *thālī* filled with unhusked rice etc. in the morning is observed on *Sonth* or the Kashmiri spring festival also. The fact that walnuts are one of the items to be seen on Navreh should also be taken note of. According to the Bhringīsha Samhitā, the four-faced Brahma is to be worshipped on this day as it was this day when he created the world and collected things that the creation may require. (This explains the assortment of things kept in

the *thālī*). The five-faced (*pañcamukha*) Shiva is also to be worshipped on the occasion, the Samhitā ordains, and also the *kuladevatā* or the tutelary deity of the family, as well as Ganesha, Surya, Vagdevata or the Goddess of Speech (Saraswati).[47] They are to be worshipped with flowers, fruit, garment, fragrant materials and other *upacāras* (worship services), and also to be anointed. While enjoining upon people to enjoy dance, music and sports, the Bhringish Samhitā regards it of great merit to have a look at the *tithipatra* or religious almanac on this occasion and listen to the forecasts made therein.[48]

The Shākta worshippers of Kashmir also attach great significance to the celebration of Navreh, as the *pratipadā* of Chaitra is also the first day of the Navarātras .sacred to Durga. For nine consecutive days starting from the *pratipadā*, nine facets or manifestations of Durga known as *navadurgā* are worshipped ritually. The nine manifestations are Śailaputrī, Brahmakumārî, Candraghaṇṭā, Kuṣmāṇḍa, Skandamātā, Kātyāyanī, Kālarātri, Mahāgaurī and Siddhidātrī, put in an ascending order. According to Dr. C.L. Raina, a Shākta scholar of Kashmir, "this order symbolizes one's journey through consciousness or *caitanya*".[49] The numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 are natural numbers, says Dr. Raina, after which comes zero or *śūnya*. "*Śūnya* is nothingness, but it is also *the parama bindu* of the *Navadurgā,* meditated upon the *sandhi* or conjunction of *amāvasya* and *pratipadā*", he explains, giving a Shākta interpretation to Navreh.[50] On the "sacred *pratipadā* day" the Iṣṭa Devī is invoked with her *dhyāna mantra* and *bīja-mantra,* he further says, adding that this was the reason why Kashmiri Pandits used to go to the Hari Parbat (Shārikā Parvata) and pay their obeisance at the Chakreshwara, reciting the Bhavānî Sahasranāma, Indrākṣī and other Devī *stotras* and praying for prosperity during the new year.[51]

The Saptarishi era followed by the Kashmiri Pandits is believed to have commenced on this very day. It is said that some 5085 years ago, the celebrated *Sapta Ṛṣis* or seven sages of the Hindu mythology assembled at a place in the Shārikā Parvata, the abode of the goddess Shārikā, at the auspicious moment when the first ray of the sun fell on Cakreśwara, and paid obeisance to her. Astrologers made this auspicious moment as the basis of their calculation of *nava - varṣa pratipadā,* marking the beginning of the Saptarishi era.

6. *Pan* – Offering of Sweet Bread Cakes to Ganesha-Lakshmi

Pan – the festival when sweet bread-cakes are offered to Ganesha, and, perhaps, Lakshmi also, was originally associated with agriculture. On this day viz. the *caturthī* or the fourth day of the bright fortnight of Bhadrapada (August-September), thread was ceremoniously spun by young maidens from newly produced cotton. Cotton is not grown in Kashmir, as the Valley is not said to have the climate suitable for its production. But there are references in some Sanskrit texts, and a persistent tradition among people, suggesting that it was produced there in the past. Whether that was actually the case or not, we have no means to ascertain. But as spun cotton thread is called '*pan*' in Kashmiri, the festival associated with it also came to be known as *Pan*.

There appears to be a lot of mix up in Pan Pūjā as it is performed today. Originally, *roṭhs* or sweet bread-cakes that are prepared on this day were offered to the twin agricultural goddesses Bhīmā and Garbhā to appease them. The names of these two local goddesses got later combined and distorted to 'Bīb Garabh Mäj' or 'Mother Bīb Garbhā', who is now regarded as a central divinity of the worship. There has been, however, no deliberate attempt to appropriate the local goddesses to the pan-Hindu pantheon. It is a pure case of forgetting and confusing the actual tradition of which there are several other examples also so far as Kashmiri Hindus are concerned.

Thus, Ganesha has come to be associated with the Pūjā because he is regarded as the remover of obstacles, and perhaps because the festival happens to fall on the Ganesha Chaturthi day (*Vināyak Tsorum*). If it happens to be a Sunday on *Vināyak Tsorum*, the Pūjā is believed to be all the more auspicious. Incorporation of Lakshmi worship in the festival seems to have been a later development.

The Story

In is present form, Pan is much akin to the *Satyanārayaṇa Pūjā* performed in many parts of north India – particularly so far as the story that is narrated on that day is concerned. There are, however, several versions of the story. According to one version, a wealthy merchant who looses all his cargo in a shipwreck and becomes miserably poor, becomes fabulously rich again because he had regularly prepared the *roṭhs* and performed the Pūjā with great devotion. In another version it is a

Brahman beset by poverty and misfortune who becomes affluent and gets rid of all his woes and miseries for the same reason. The central theme of all the versions is the same –amelioration of one's lot because of the religious merit acquired through regular Pan Pūjā. Though too simplistic, narration of the story is an essential part of the ceremony. It is here that the 'Bīb Garabh Mäj' acquires the features of Lakshmi, the two divinities merging into one another.

The Pūjā

Pan ceremony follows the same ritualistic pattern that one comes across in most other Pūjās of Kashmiri Hindus. At least that is what one gathers from the manual written by Pandit Prem Nath Shastri which appears to have watered down the purely local elements in it. A water-pot (*gaḍva*) decorated with vermilion (*tilak*), flower garland and *närivan* (protection cord) and filled water and milk is kept in the place sanctified for the ritual and a nutmeg, an one rupee coin and some shoots of *dūb* grass (called *dramun* in Kashmiri) inside the pot. Assuming the pot to represent Ganesha and Riddhi-Siddhi or Lakshmi, the worshipper sits with his face towards the east and begins the worship. According to the local tradition, the pot represents the 'Bīb Garabh Mäj'. The *dramun* or the *dūb* grass known for its ability to survive in all conditions could well be symbolic of immortality. The worshipper then ties the piece of cotton-thread supposed to have been spun by a young girl to the water - pot. He sprinkles a little water from a small vessel consecrated by sandalwood paste or vermilion and offers three flowers into the water pot representing the deity / deities with the mantra '*samvaḥ sṛjāmi hṛdyaṁ*' Then he recites the usual mantra for establishing life breath in the icon, '*Aśvino prāṇastau*'. Holding some grains of barley and a flower in hand he recites sectarian versions of the Gayatri mantra three times, each directed at Ganesha and Lakshmi - '*tat puruṣāya vidmahe Vakratunḍāya dhīmahī tanno Dantī pracodayāt*'[33] / *Śriyai vidmahe Kamalvāṣinyai dhīmahī tanno Lakṣmī pracodayāt*'[53] and seeks permission of the two deities to start the Pūjā. Strewing two blades of *darbha* grass or flowers on the floor, he offers *āsana* or seat to them with the mantras '*Om gaṇāntvā Gaṇapatiṁ havāmahe*' and '*Bhagvataḥ Vināyakasya Vallabhā sahitasya Śri Mahāgaṇeśasya Siddhalakṣmyaḥ Mahālakṣmyaḥ āsanaṁ namaḥ*'.[54] It would be interesting to note that the Ganapati mantra '*gaṇāntvā Gaṇapatiṁ*" has been adopted from the Yajurveda.

Invocation is made to the deities, Ganesha and Lakshmi, for being present at the ritual setting and accept the worship - *"pūjāṁ grahāṇa bhagvan me adya tuṣṭa"*, ("Accept my worship, O Lord, and be pleased with me today"). A series *of upacāras* (services) are offered to the two deities. First *pādya,* the water for washing feet, then *arghya* or sanctified water with rice grains, milk, herbs etc. Then pouring water over them, they are bathed and garment (in the form of a flower) is offered to them followed by offerings of incense (*dhūpa*) and lamp (*dīpā*). *Cāmara* or the fly-whisk is to be waved over them, according to Shastri's manual, and food and water for rinsing the mouth (*ācamanīya*) offered. The officiating priest is then offered his fees (*dakṣiṇā*) and finally all the members of the family gather around the worshipper to listen to the '*Pana kathā*' or the 'story of Pan'. The mantras '*Gaṇānāṁ tvā*' and '*Bhagvate Vināyakāya Vallabhā sahitāya*' are used with all the *upacāras*. Everyone is asked to touch the *thālī* containing the *roṭhs* (sweet bread-cakes) offered to Ganesha and given some shoots of the *dramun* and flowers to make a final offering to the Pan deities. A collective prayer by all marks the conclusion of the Pūjā, after which the *roṭhs* are partaken of as *naivedya* and distributed among relatives, neighbours and friends.

7. Jyeṣtha Aṣṭamī Festival and the Worship of Kshīr Bhavānī

So widespread is the cult of the Mother Goddess or Divine Shakti among Kashmir Hindus that every family in the community has one form or other of hers as their tutelary deity. The Kashmiri expression for it means the "affiliation" or "orientation" of a family towards a specific form of the Great Devi – the most popular of them being Kshīr Bhavanī or Rājñā (pronounced Rāgnyā), and Shārikā. The shrines of these two goddesses at Tulmul and Hari Parbat respectively are held most sacred by all Hindus of Kashmir, irrespective of their cultic affiliations. The goddesses Mahākalī, Jwālā, Bālā, Tripurā, Tripura Sundarī, Jyeṣṭhā and Bhadrakālī are aiso widely worshipped by them as manifestations of the Divine Mother, indicating a deep Shakta or Tantric influence on their religious beliefs.

According to the origin myth of Kshīr Bhavanī given in the '*Rājñī Prādurbhāva*' chapter of the 'Bhringīsha Saṁhitā', the goddess was brought by Hanuman all the way from Lanka where she was worshipped by Ravana in her manifestation as Shyāmā.[55] Disgusted with Ravana's evil ways, she asked Hanuman to carry her to

the land of Satisar (Kashmir) where she took her abode in Tulamūlya (present Tulmul). The shrine of the Devi stands on an islet in the centre of an irregular heptagonal spring. Earlier a mulberry tree grew there beneath which the Devi's image was installed. The Dogra Maharaja Pratap Singh built a small marble temple on the islet in 1912. What is most interesting is that the spring is believed to change its colour miraculously from time to time.

As the Devi is said to have made her appearance (*prādurbhāva*) on Jyeṣṭha Aṣṭamī, or the eighth day of the bright half of Jyeshtha (May-June), a big festival is held these on that day, with Kashmiri Hindus flocking to the shrine in their thousands. Another festival is held on Āṣāḍha Aṣṭamī (June-July) with equal devotional fervour, the sacred spring having been discovered on the *saptamī* (seventh day) of that month. In fact devotees from all parts of Kashmir visit the shrine on every *ashṭamī* (eighth day) of the lunar month. The devotees after their worship, individually or in groups, wave lamps (*dīpa*) and burn incense (*dhūpa*) while reciting hymns to the goddess and singing devotional songs. They mainly make offerings of *khīr* to her and of milk and loaf- sugar with flowers, which they offer into the spring. In the evening a congregation of devotees gathers around the spring and a collective *āratī* is performed with the priests and the devotees chanting hymns amidst ringing of bells, beating of cymbals and blowing of conch shells. Ritually no prescribed procedure is laid down for the Pūjā at Kshīr Bhavanī. The Bhringīsha Samhitā simply says that the Devi, whose mantra is fifteen-syllabled, accepts offerings of milk, sugar candy and ghee only - *sā kṣīra - khaṇḍādi bhojanā*."[56] The offering of *khīr* made to the Goddess is distributed as *naivedya* among friends and relatives, but at an individual level. Everybody performs circumambulations after having worshipped and prayed at the shrine.

However, as the Bhringīśa Saṁhitā has prescribed, one can also worship the *cakra* or mystic diagram of the Devi.[57]

yantra pūjāṁ prakurvaṇaḥ Śiva eveti niścitam /
athvā vāgbhavairmantraiḥ pūjayat jagadambikāṁ //

The *cakra* of Kshīr Bhavanī "consists of seven parts enclosed one within the other".[58] It is also known as her *yantra* and embodies the Mother Goddess with her Shaktis. We shall discuss this in our next chapter which is exclusively on ritual art. Here we shall only point out that in the centre of the innermost triangle (*trikoṇa*)

of the diagram is the *bindu* or dot representing her with the mantra, '*Śrī Mahāṛajñyai namaḥ*'. Her *dhyāna mantra* as revealed to the well known Kashmiri mystic Shri Krishna Kar who was an ardent devotee of hers, is:

Yā dvādaśārka pariṣaṇḍita mūrtirekā /
siṁhāsana - sthitamati murgair - vṛtānca //
devīṁ - ananya - gatiri puvaratan prapannam /
taṁ naumi bhargavapuṣām paramārtha rajñīṁ //

["I make obeisance to that one Goddess who, having taken the position of the Supreme God is the Queen in reality, whose form is made of light and is adored by (the lustre of) twelve suns, who cannot be observed through senses, who is seated on a throne and is wrapped with serpents."]

The Pūjā of the *cakra,* it may be noted, involves *pañcopacāra* or worship service in five steps consisting of offering of fragrant materials, flowers, incense, lamp and food (*naivedya*) Then the names of the female deities presiding over various *cakras* are pronounced, worshipping each one of them with flowers. The fact that the Goddess is approached ritually through her mantra and her *yantra* indicates that her mode of worship is Tantric, though of the right hand path (*dakṣinācāra*).

8. Worship of Goddess Shārikā at Hari Parbat

As mentioned earlier, Goddess Shārikā is associated with the creation myth of Kashmir and also with the beginning of the Saptarishi era of the Kashmiri calendar. She has her abode on the Hari Parbat (Shārikā Parvata) hill in Srinagar, which is also known as Pradyumnapīṭha or Siddhapīṭha, where she resides in association with a host of other goddesses, all regarded as manifestations of the Mother Goddess. She is, therefore, a very significant goddess of the Kashmiri Hindu pantheon. Before their recent exodus, the Hindus of Kashmir would perform daily circumambulations of the shrine dedicated to Goddess Shārikā and the shrines of other divinities on and around the Hari Parbat hill. The entire area is said to be sacred and represents '*praṇava*' or the mystic syllable '*Om*'. Identified with Durgā or Chaṇḍî, she is shown having eighteen arms (*aṣṭādaśa bhujā*) like Goddess Rāgnyā of Kshīr Bhavanī, with the lion as her mount. In her *dhyāna mantra* she is depicted iconographically as holding a conch, discus, club, goad, bow, arrows,

sword, trident, spear, plough, hatchet, hand-drum and a bowl filled with jewels. She is seated on a red lotus and dwells on Pradyumanapīṭha located in the town founded by Pravarasena (Srinagar) in Kashmir. The *saptarṣis* (seven sages) bow before her lotus feet. She wears a snake as a garland around her neck. Anointed with vermilion and saffron paste, she has three eyes and she dazzles like a thousand suns.

The Bringīsha Saṁhitā gives her mantra as '*Om hrīṁ śrīṁ hrāṁ śam Śārikā Devī* and identifies her with the letters of the Sanskrit alphabet from '*ka*' to '*ta*' in a hymn addressed to her.[59] She grants all desires of her devotees and bestows universal success, the Bhringīsha Saṁhitā says, and should be worshipped in her shrine on every Tuesday and Saturday as the Mother of the Universe.[60] Reciting hymns to the Goddess, repeating her mantra and offering worship to her delivers one from all sins and misfortunes. She should be offered milk with clarified butter, candy sugar, fruit, roots, and anointed with vermilion, saffron and sandalwood paste, camphor, musk and perfumed oils. Offerings of non-vegetarian food like meat and fish with bread-cakes, betel leaf. Different kinds of flowers should also be made to her at her shrine with great devotion.[61] Apart from her anthropomorphic form or the rock that represents her at her shrine, Shārikā is worshipped in her *yantra* form too. She is also known as *Cakreśwarī* or the Mistress of the Cakra. A diagram of the *śricakra,* it will be interesting to note, exists in a natural form on a rock at Hari Parbat. In fact, the entire shrine is regarded as an embodiment of the *śrīcakra*. Worshipping and anointing the *yantra* of the Goddess at home too is believed to bestow upon the worshipper highest spiritual powers, the *yantra* being not just a sacred symbol but Shārikā herself. The Bringīsha Saṁhitā repeatedly enjoins upon the devotee to worship her in the *yantra* form as one obtains highest religious attainments by this ritual[62]:

> *tasmāt sarva prayatnena pūjayet Maheśwarīṁ /*
> *yantrarūpe mahācakra yāti Sadāśivam padaṁ //*
>
> ('Therefore, worship the Great Goddess in the form of the *yantra* of the great *cakra;* as that can lead one to attaining the abode of Shiva.')

The *yantra,* the text says, can be of crystal, gem or all metals. It should be worshipped in the north-eastern direction as all gods reside there.

9. Worship of Tripura Sundarī

Tripura Sundarī, literally meaning "she who is lovely in the three worlds", is one of the most important goddesses worshipped in the Tantric tradition in Kashmir. The cult is particularly popular among the Tiku clan of Kashmiri Pandits who celebrate her festival on *Tiky Tsoram* which falls one day before Vasant Pañchamī. The surname 'Tiku' is derived, from '*trika*', according to popular etymology. The Tikus offer both *khīr* in the morning and lamb's chopped liver (called *tsarvan* in Kashmiri) in the evening to her on the day as part of her Pūjā. The mystery can be partly explained by the fact hat her devotees believe that she combines in her form all three Goddesses, Mahālakshmī; Mahāsaraswatī and Mahākalī, and also all three of their cosmic functions. However, she is also worshipped by the entire Hindu community as such in Kashmir – and from very early times. Giving several interpretations of the tripartite nature of her name the Kālikā Purāṇa says that Tripurā is adored in three aspects: Tripurā - Bālā (the virgin), Tripurā Sundarī (the beautiful) and Tripura Bhairavī (the terrible). As Tripura Sundarī (Ṣodaśī), she occupies a prominent position in both Kashmiri and South Indian Tantrism. In Kashmir, Tripurā worship and ritual practices related to it have remained mostly esoteric and secret, though there is also a strong devotional flavour to them.

Tantric texts like the Vāmakeśvara Tantra, suggest that there has been a long tradition of worshipping Tripurā in Kashmir. This is confirmed by the ancient temple of the Goddess in Uma Nagari, a town in South Kashmir where she was worshipped in her anthropomorphic form. The temple was known for its splendid wooden architecture, but it has been burnt down to ashes by terrorists. According to an oral tradition prevalent among her devotes of the Tiku clan who claim her to be their tutelary deity, there is a place sacred to her in Srinagar also where she emerged from a sacred pond in the Drabiyar locality as a beautiful but naked young girl (*ṣodaśī*). It is here that families of the Tiku clan used to congregate for worshipping her on the *Tiky Tsoram* day, as related to me by Prof. H.L. Tiku, who now lives in Jammu. The family of Prof. Tiku used to worship a wooden image of Tripurā at their home and managed to carry it to Jammu on leaving Kashmir in 1990.

In Tantric texts like the Yoginī Tantra and Vāmakeśavara Tantra also the Goddess is depicted as eternally young and naked or clothed in animal hides. However, for the most part the features that are characterized by her principal names

like Tripura Sundarī, Lalitā and Rājarajeśvarī emphasize her beautiful, auspicious, pure and gracious nature as Mother of the Universe and associate her with wealth, royal power, the protection of the cosmic order and the defeat of demons. These texts also suggest her erotic character and present her as a symbol of beauty and charm. The *Yoginī Tantra* enjoins the devotee to contemplate Bālā-Tripurā-Sundarī, the form in which she is mainly worshipped in Kashmir, as a naked sixteen-year-old girl (*ṣodaśī*). But the term *ṣodaśī* has another connotation also. Though literally it means sixteen years old, it also means, "she who is the sixteenth", that is one who goes beyond the fifteen phases of the moon, or the lunar *tithis* and is the sixteenth, encompassing them all – "the reality that underlies rythms and impels the cosmos along an orderly course". Her devotees identify her with the highest reality, the ultimate principle.

Apart from her anthropomorphic image, which is her *sthūla* or gross form and is offered the standard sixteen-step Pūjā, Tripura Sundarī is accessed ritually through her mantra and *yantra*. In fact her worship is an elaborate Tantric ritual, to which both mantras and *yantras* are central. But this kind of worship is not meant for the uninitiated. As David Kinsley has pointed out in his book 'Tantric Vision of the Divine Feminine', "each syllable of the mantra, each line and angle of the *yantra,* is infused with meaning."[63] The Srīvidyā Mantra, which is regarded as the mantra of Tripura Sundarī, consists of fifteen syllables (*pañcādasākṣari*)*: ka, e, la, hrīm, ha, sa, ka, ha, la, hrīṁ, sa, ka, la hrīṁ*. For those who follow her cult, the mantra is not the Devi's symbol but the Devi herself in her sonic form. (Incidentally the Goddesses Kshir Bhavani and Sharika also have the fifteen-syllabled mantra, indicating their oneness). In her *yantra* form Tripura Sundarī is identified with the *śrīcakra* in the Tantric traditions followed in Kashmir. To quote Kinsely again, "The Srīcakra is the goddess herself in complete, unmeditated form it fully contains and expresses. As the *svarūpa* (own form) of the goddess, who encompasses all reality; everything inheres in the Srīcakra; all of reality and the very nature of reality can be read in terms of it. If we think of the mantra as an expression of ultimate reality (Brahman) in the form of sound, then we can think of the Śrīcakra as the very form of Brahman in schematic or visual form."[64] We shall dilate upon the *śrītcakra* and its mvstic meanings in our chapter on ritual arts of Kashmir. Suffice it to say here that the Pūjā of Tripura Sundarī, Shārikā and Rāgnyā, as of the other goddesses commonly

worshipped in Kashmir, cannot be fully understood or visualized except in the ritual context of the Tantric tradition which flourished there and still has its relevance.

10. Kāva Punim and other Festivals

Kāva Punim or the 'Crows Day of the Full Moon' is another typical religious festival of Kashmiri Hindus. It has, however, gone into the oblivion now though it delightfully combines characteristics of a folk-festival and religious ritual. The festival falls on Māgha Pūrnimā (January-February) when *khicharī* is prepared ritually to feed the crows in the belief that ancestors come to the earth in their form and are pleased by the sacrificial food. Its ritual aspects are, however, subdued by the enthusiasm with which children participate, or rather used to participate in it, singing a song to invite the crows to come and enjoy the *khicharī* cooked for them. A kind of a 'crow-house' was built on this day by joining two pieces of wood and the *khicharī* kept on it for the crows.

11. Other Festivals

Kashmiri Hindus, in fact, celebrated a large number of festivals like Gangā Āṭham, Tīla Āṭham, Darba Māvas, Vyathā Truvah, Shri Panchami, Anta Tsodah, Mahākāli's Birthday etc. which had distinct ritual aspects also, but most of which are now forgotten, the changed times having taken their toll. Some like Janamāṣṭamī (which is actually, and interestingly, celebrated one day earlier on the *saptamī*), Dashahār (Dussehra), Durgāṣṭamī, Rāmanavamī, are still celebrated, but not all of them have a distinct Kashmiri flavour. Some like *Gora Tray* and *Hāra Manḍul* come in the category of ritual arts and will be discussed in the next chapter. Many others have lost out to geography, the Pandits being unable to celebrate them as they have lost their original habitat.

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CHAPTER 9

Ritual Arts

Ritual art complements religious practices and traditions as a means to express the invisible in terms of the visible. Though not driven necessarily by any aesthetic impulse, this art in its various forms helps to fulfill the spiritual needs of the community, and is therefore of considerable significance. Among Hindus, art has an essential functional value as it forms an integral part of religious ceremony associated with domestic rituals, personal sacraments as well as modes of worship. The visual impact that images, paintings, drawings, diagrams, symbols create on the mind of a worshipper is so immediate and powerful that these have been used for transmitting religious ideas and instruction to wide audiences through the centuries. To put it in the words of Heather Elgood, the role of Hindu religious art is "to act as a threshold between the worlds of gods and man". In practice some of these art forms serve as an aid to meditation, while some of them are believed to have the potential of driving away evil forces and protecting one from calamity or misfortune. Many of them are also associated reassuringly with auspiciousness and well-being which they are supposed to attract through their magical power. For an average Kashmiri Hindu too ritual art remains an integral part of his religious life despite the fact that many forms of such art have virtually disappeared or are on the verge of disappearing. An attempt to study their function, meaning and symbolism in their present state of decline, therefore, presents a tough challenge to any interested researcher. This is particularly the case as no one has so far cared to open a systematic line of inquiry in this difficult but interesting area.

It is true that the conceptual, formalistic and symbolic aspects of the ritual arts of the Kashmiri Hindus have much in common with the visual elements of Hindu ritual systems in general. They draw profusely on the pan-Indian Hindu pool of symbols, motifs, signs and concepts. Yet, within the broader framework of the traditions of Hindu religious art and its vital relationship with custom, ritual action, popular beliefs and even cosmology and philosophy, there are numerous variations that these art forms can be seen to have created. Surely, some of these like the *Gora Tray*, *Vyūg*, *Krūl Pachh*, *Krūl*, *Divta Mūn*, *Ṭeky Tāl*, *Chittāvāsa*, the clay vessels used in Shivaratri worship, the drawings related to life-cycle rituals etc. have features which are distinctly and authentically Kashmiri. One thing that strikes us immediately is the pervasive Tantric influence over Kashmiri Hindu religious arts – and this has permeated down to the folk level as well. Another feature which must be taken note of is that most of these, barring *Vyūg* and *Krūl*, and perhaps *Ṭeky Tāl*, are executed exclusively by the priestly class whose assistance and mediation the common Kashmri Hindu seeks invariably in the performance of rituals and religious customs. And with the number of performing priests declining day be day, these arts are vanishing fast. The device of listening to instructions recorded on cassettes, "cassette *guruji*" as it is called jocularly, can be of no avail in saving them from this sad fate. It is in this perspective that we are going to describe below the main features of whatever can be classified today under the category of ritual arts of Kashmiri Brahmins.

(1) The *Gora Tray*

Not many years ago family priests would gift paintings to the members of the households of their patrons on the *Gaurī Tritīyā* day or the third day of the bright fortnight of Magha (February – March). Attractively painted in bright water colours, the paintings would bring delight to the hearts of children for whom they were particularly meant, as *Gaurī Tritīya* was a day on which Saraswati, the Goddess of Learning was worshipped in Kashmir – two days before Basant Panchami. The paintings, which were made on large sheets of paper were known as *Gora Tray*, which is the name of the festival itself. Special paintings of relatively larger size and more artistic in appearance were given to newly married women, perhaps in anticipation of their motherhood. It may look rather strange that a day which is dedicated to the worship of Saraswati should be called *Gaurī Tritīya*, Gaurī being another name of

Parvati. But in Kashmir the two deities have always tended to merge with each other, the image of Shāradā mounted on the lion instead of the traditional swan in the famous Shārdā temple of Kashmir (now in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir) being an example. Shāradā sharing some of the attributes of Durgā or Durgā having some of those that Shāradā has is nothing new in Kashmiri tradition.

In each *Gora Tray* the central space was occupied by a picture of the Goddess of Learning, usually painted along with a hymn in her praise. The hymn most commonly used was:

> *Saraswatī mahābhāge vidye kamala locane /*
> *Viśwarupī viśālākṣī vidyāṁ dehi Saraswatī //*
>
> ["O highly exalted Goddess of Learning, O lotus-eyed Saraswati, O you, who exists in various forms, and who has large eyes, grant us the boon of knowledge."]

Another hymn '*Śārade varade devī*' ('O Shāradā, giver of boons') was also quite popular. It would be, however, wrong to imply, as some have done, that *Gora Tray* was a kind of certificate issued to students graduating from the Shārdāpiṭha after the completion of an academic session. No evidence to support this suggestion exists. Sometimes other gods and goddesses were also painted in the *Gora Tray.* It had decorative borders with floral motifs or animal figures painted on them – usually those of elephants and tigers. Sometimes hunting scenes were also depicted. Perhaps they were painted with the purpose of juxtaposing the divine with the ordinary, mundane world.

The colours were bright and warm and were prepared from ordinary vegetable dyes. The figures of the divinities or the animals were not rigid or formal, but lively and un-stereotyped. Were it not for the fact that the *Gora Tray* paintings were entirely prepared by Brahmin painters belonging to a section of the priestly class among Kashmiri Hindus, they could easily be called works of religious folk art – and perhaps in spite of this fact they actually were. The origin of the *Gora Tray* is not known. There is no reference to it in any of the extant Sanskrit texts of Kashmir, but the tradition appears, to have been quite old – it certainly could not have emerged suddenly in the recent past. Perhaps its roots go back to the *paṭa citras* that the Nilamata Purāna mentions. Possibly it was already in a state of decay in the early

decades of the 20th century when oleographs had started replacing the art of manual painting. Today, the painters of the *Gora Tray* have totally disappeared from the scene and with them the beautiful art they specialized in. This is perhaps because of the humiliation that the priests suffered at the hands of their patrons (*yajamānas*) who considered themselves to be superior to them and often offered them a pittance for their services and that too with undisguised contempt. The younger generation of the priestly class of Kashmiri Hindus has almost entirely given up priesthood and taken to other more lucrative professions to protect their dignity. The tragedy is that not a single specimen of the *Gora Tray* has survived today in any Kashmiri Hindu household. The death of a folk art form has gone completely unwept and unsung.

(2) *Vyūg* or Floor Decoration

Unlike *Gora Tray* the *Vyūg* or the circular pattern drawn on the ground, usually the threshold of the house, at sacraments related to transition or passage of time, still survives though in a very crude form. Its continuation as a ritual art is more the outcome of ritual necessity than any urge to preserve a manifestation of culture. It is executed freehand, mostly by women, with rice paste, dried and powdered henna leaves, turmeric powder and other natural materials or with coloured powders. Coloured sawdust was a later innovation, now supplanted by easily available chemical powders. The origin of the art of the floor painting in Kashmir can be traced to very ancient times for it has been mentioned in the Nilamata Purāna as *bhūmi śobhā*.[1] This also indicates that it must have originally been of a decorative nature while also serving a ritual purpose. Though no details are given in the the Nilamata, there must have been a whole repertoire of designs used in drawing a *vyūg*, as is the case with the forms of floor – painting prevalent in other parts of the country like *kolam*, *alpanā* or *rangolī*, to which it clearly appears to be related. Today though it retains its outer circular form, there is hardly any variety in the patterns or designs that are drawn not to speak of any artistic beauty, both men and women of the Kashmiri Hindu community having hardly any knowledge left of how a *vyūg* is to be executed. However, Stella Kramrisch's view that "the art of floor painting is a visual form of magic, a delineation of the presence of the Numinous,"[2] applies to the *vyūg* as well.

As we have pointed out above, the *vyūg* was drawn as part of the sacraments related to different stages of transition in life like the *Shrāna Sŏndar* or purification

rite of a new born child, the sacred thread investiture of a boy and the marriage. The *vyūg* is now drawn mostly at the time of marriage, with the bride and bridegroom made to stand on it when the bridegroom's party arrives at the bride's place and also when the two leave for the bridegroom's house after the nuptials are over. It must be noted here that the Kashmiri Hindus consider the bridegroom to be an embodiment of Shiva and the bride of Parvati. The cosmic circle represented by the *vyūg* is a place consecrated to invoke the presence of the divine couple so that the bride and the bridegroom identify themselves with them and receive their grace. The *vyūg* is drawn at the sacred thread investiture of a boy signifying the end of the period of his initiation by the "Guru" – a remnant of the *samāvārtana* ceremony. The boy is made to cast off the outfit of a '*brahmacārī,* dressed up in a new attire and to stand on the *vyūg,* which is regarded as auspicious. Ladies of the household welcome him as a *snātaka* who has 'returned home', singing and dancing on the occasion. The *vyūg* was also a part of the purification ceremony of a new-born child, *Shrāna Sŏndar*, as it was believed to be auspicious and having the magic power to ward off evil sprits and influences. This, however, has been totally relegated to the oblivion now.

(3) *Hāra Manḍul*

As pointed out by Stella Kramrisch, Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa, the most ancient treatise on Indian painting, prescribes the worship of the Sun god through an eight-petaled lotus flower drawn on the ground. "Several other Puranas", she adds "speak of the art of drawing the sun on the ground and that the sun was worshipped in a circle in early days."[3] Such a representation of the Sun god was made on the ground, generally on the threshold of the house in Kashmir also. Known as *hāramanḍul,* it was drawn in bright coloured powders on the seventh day of the bright fortnight in Ashāḍha (July-August) called Hār in Kashmiri. The sun at that time is in the *ārdrā nakṣtra* (constellation). *Tāhrī* (rice cooked with turmeric and ghee) and *khīr* were prepared on the *saptamī* day as offerings to the deity and were partaken of as *naivedya.* So far as I can remember, the drawing of the *hāramanḍul* was not accompanied by recitation of any mantra or performance of any other ritual at the time of my childhood when I last observed it being executed by ladies of the house. Perhaps it was already on the threshold of vanishing at that time and not many years later it was completely forgotten. The Nilamata Purāna makes several references to the worship of the Sun

god in Kashmir, but gives no details and says nothing about the *hāramanḍul*. However, it must be pointed out that the Vishṇudharmottara Purāṇa is believed by scholars to have been composed in Kashmir or in its close vicinity.

(4) *Krūl*

Like floor decoration, wall painting is a traditional practice prevalent among the Hindus of Kashmir since ancient times, as it is in other regions and among other communities of India. The Vishṇudharmottara mentions the making of *dhūli citra,* that is paintings drawn on the earth with coloured powders, and *rasa citra,* or designs made in liquid colours as decorative and ritual arts. Both these arts flourished in ancient Kashmir also. As for wall painting, it is a common and significant practice in many parts of the country, as Heather Elgood writes. Women employ it to protect the home from disruptive and maleficent spirits, she observes, adding, "the apertures of the home such as the windows and doors are thought to need particular protection".[4] In Kashmir, Hindu women paint floral and vegetal designs on the wall above the entrance door and along its jambs. This is done on auspicious occasions like marriage, sacred thread investiture of a boy and entry into a new house in the belief that it brings protection and prosperity. Known as *krūl,* this ritual painting is executed one day before a marriage or the investiture of a boy with the sacred thread, coinciding with the *divagon* ceremony of which it is an essential part. On both these occasions it is the prerogative of the paternal aunt to execute the *krūl*. The designs comprise of floral and vegetal motifs, usually vine scrolls, which are painted freehand with liquid colours. A *swastikā* mark or 'Om' is made on the top with vermilion to reinforce the auspiciousness that the *krūl* is supposed to charge the home with. A group of women relatives gather there and sing auspicious songs at the time the *krūl* is being painted – '*krūl khārun*' is what they call it is Kashmiri. A spicy gruel called '*ver*' is cooked and distributed on fhe occasion.

(5) *Divta-mūn*

Another ritual art of Kashmir, associated with the *divagon* ceremony, is *divta-mūn,* again a kind of wall-painting. The word '*divta"* is derived from Sanskrit '*devatā*', meaning a divinity or divinities, while the word '*mūṇ*' means the column of a wall. *Divta-mūn,* therefore, means a column on which divinities are painted. It

consists of drawings executed with vermilion on usually a white background. These drawings show the abodes of the seven *mātṛkas* or mother goddesses and Ganesha in Nandanavana, the Garden of Paradise. The Garden, also known as *ratna-vāṭikā,* the 'garden dazzling with gems', is represented by *kalpavṛkṣa* (the wish fulfilling tree), the stylistic figure of the tree having a *ṣaṭcakra* base – a Tantric symbol. The deities Ganesha and the *mātṛkās* are invoked to shower blessings and benedictions on the person whose marriage or sacred thread investiture ceremony is to be performed. The seven mother goddesses form a group and are seen as manifestations or extensions of the Great Goddess. They are named Brahmī, Maheśwarī, Kaumārī, Vaiṣṇavī, Vārāhī, Mahendrī or Aindrī and Cāmuṇḍā, their invocation showing the deep influence of Shaktism, the cult of the female principle, on Kashmiri Hindu ritual. Their presence invoked through mantras and painting of *divta-mūn* is believed to charge the ritual setting with divine power.

(6) Horoscopes and Almanacs

Horoscopes and almanacs have become an integral part of Kashmiri Pandit life. Known as *zātuk* and *nechipatúr* in the Kashmiri language, they reveal the degree of obsessive interest that the community has in astrology, the average Pandit refusing to do anything without consulting the stars. Till the early years of the 20th century, the *zātuks* as well as the *nechipatris* (<Skt. *nakṣatra patrikā*) were illustrated, with miniature paintings at the top of a scroll of paper as one of their features. Planetary positions and configurations in the horoscopes generally illustrated by means of diagrams of the nine planetary deities (*navagraha*) were also depicted in some. Here it was the priest who combined in himself the role of the artist as well, producing paintings in the style of traditional Kashmiri miniatures. The priest-artist generally painted images of popular deities with Shārikā, Rāgnyā, Durgā, Shiva and Pārvatī, Shiva's family, Ganesha, and sometimes Svachhanda Bhairava or Vishnu on his Garuda as his repertoire. The family priest gifted these items to his patron (*yajamāna*) without charging any specific amount for them and leaving it to the generosity of the latter to compensate him for his labour. The paintings were executed within an outer frame shaped generally like the trefoil arch of the Kashmiri temple architecture with the motif of a saffron flower at the top and some other places. This motif was a distinctive mark of these paintings. Another peculiarly Kashmiri feature was that the

female deities were often portrayed with their feminine contours subdued. The lion, or rather the tiger, who is the mount of Durgā and her manifestations such as Shārikā, Rāgnyā etc., appears too tame and gentle. Often there is a canopy or a parasol over the heads of the deities portrayed. The iconography is conventional and the range of colours rather limited, the emphasis being on the image of the deity in conformity with the ritual context. However, with the introduction of printing, the practice of painting the horoscopes and almanacs with hand gradually disappeared, bringing to an end a long and interesting tradition of ritual art in Kashmir which made religious paintings available to a large section of the society.

(7) *Krūl Pachh*

Krūl Pachh can be described as a kind of mini-almanac (*jantrī*) with a painting at the top of a small scroll of paper. The lower part of the scroll would give some information about *tithis,* asterisms etc. It was gifted by the family priest to the children of his patrons (*yajmāna*) fifteen days after Navreh, the Kashmiri New Year's Day, for whom it was exclusively meant probably to give them a preliminary lesson in astrology. The regular almanac or *jantarī* for the New Year for the use of his patron was delivered by him on the eve of the festival. The paintings on the *Krūl Pachh* were the similar to the ones that were made on the horoscopes or *jantrīs*. With the disappearance of the hand-painted horoscopes, *Krūl Pachh* too vanished from the ritual art scene.

(8) *Ṭekytāl*

Ṭekytāl, as we have already described in our chapter on Mekhal or Yajñopavita ceremony, is a ritual drawing made on the top of the headgear of ladies. Made on a piece of paper with saffron-paste or vermilion, it consists of a diagram of the *śrīcakara* or *cakra* and *bindu,* with a rectangular configuration at the base marked with dots here and there. The diagram is consecrated with the mantras of Shakti and then pasted or pinned on the headgear. As an easier alternative to painting, the design is also cut out on golden or cloured paper. But the design, whether painted or made of cut-paper, is meant only for those ladies who are close relatives of the boy whose sacred thread ceremony is being performed. The word *ṭekytāl* literally means a design of *ṭīka* marks displayed on the crown of the head. It was also called *ṭeky pūts* when Kasymiri Pandit

women wore the peculiar Kashmiri headgear known as the *pūts*. The *pūts* was a long headgear shaped like the hood of a serpent at the top and tapering into two serpent – like tail – ends which reached the ankles. *Pūts* was replaced by the *sārī* in the thirties and forties of the 20th century, though some older ladies still wear it. Though its purpose appears more to be decorative, the *ṭekytāl* was probably used to invoke the benedictions of the Mother Goddess whose manifestation all women were considered to be.

(9) *Manḍala and Yantra*

Abhinavagupta has devoted one full chapter, the 31st Ahnīka of the Tantrāloka to description of *manḍalas*. interpreting the term variously as (1) *devatā cakraṁ* or a circle in which a deity is installed, (2) the group of nerves for the passage of *prānic* currents, and (3) the diagram of the trident with lotuses.[5] Here we are concerned with only the first and the last of these concepts, focusing ourselves on its two dimensional aspect as ritual art. In this context, it is a mystic circular diagram representing the cosmos and is an important part of Tantric worship that was once very popular in Kashmir. The cosmic circle is a visual aid for concentration and introvertive meditation. As the principal deity occupies the central seat, it is the most sacred part of a *manḍala* with the subsidiary deities arranged around it along with guardians of the eight directions of space (*kśetrapālas*). "It is here", writes Heather Eigood about the central square, "that the worshipper may experience transformation." Drawn in accordance with Tantric cosmology, the *manḍala* is "like a minute ground plan of the universe, enclosing a force-field of energy", which the adept seeks to control. It helps him to attain mystic insights and *siddhis* or spiritual powers of which it is a graphic representation.

Both Hindu and Buddhist Tantras describe many varieties of these concentric configurations with their complex calculations and dimensions, the great number of deities that constitute them, the divine figures that fill them with their mystic presence and power, the cosmic ideas that underlie their formation. In the Tantrāloka we find Abhinavagupta describing more than one hundred types to the minutest detail. In Parātriśikā Vivaraṇa, he talks of the Manḍala of the Trident and Lotuses, (*triśūlābja-manḍalaṁ*), explaing the symbolism of the triangle that represents the divine Shakti in all her aspects. A white lotus, he describes, is placed on each prong of the *triśūla*

for worship. Such a *manḍala* was drawn for the purpose of initiation. But apart from their mystic, spiritual and ritualistic aspects, *manḍalas* are artistic creations also. Regarding the aesthetics of *manḍalas,* we are tempted to quote B. Bhattacharya. He writes:

> "The *manḍalas* are consecrated to the advent of the Grace of the Deity. These too, are geometrically designed into a variety of 'courts' and 'yards', 'pockets' and 'arenas'. The actual drawing itself becomes an exercise in attention, and cultivation of the faculties of art, aesthetics and sense of grace. The concentration demanded in the drawing of a *manḍala* with care and exactness has to be seen to be believed. The .outcome is certainly a piece of art".[7]

Howsoever, the art of the two dimensional *manḍala,* which was drawn with five coloured powders or particles, may have been aesthetically pleasing and useful to the Kashmiri Shaivas or Buddhists in their respective rituals of initiation or enlightenment, it no longer forms a part of the ritualistic pattern of Kashmiri Hindu religious life. Today it has importance mainly for the student of religious history.

(10) *Yantra*

If mantra can be described as the sonic form of the deity, then *yantra* or *cakra* is the very deity in visual form. Generally speaking, *yantra* is a mystical diagram or geometrical pattern "serving as a chart for revealing the characteristics of deity", to put it in the words of the eminent religious historian late N.N. Bhattacharya. In 'Tantrābhidāna', a Tantric Lexicon prepared by him, Bhattacharya writes:

> "*Yantra* is variously interpreted as an instrument, the body and abode of the deity, amulet, mental faculties, pure consciousness; doctrinal intricacies, microcosm of human body and so on."[8]

> "For the followers of Shakti, *yantra* is not an abbreviated or schematic representation of the anthropomorphic goddess, but the goddess herself in her complete, unmediated form", explains David Kinsely in the context of *śricakra.*[9] Both mantra and *yantra,* it must be noted, are central to the worship of Shakti or the Mother Goddess – a cult that is predominately popular among Kashmiri Hindus. *Yantras* are drawn on paper, leaves, stones and cloth or engraved on metal. Used for focusing) concentration and as a

guide to meditation the worship of *yantras* is regarded as *"bahiryāga"* or the external worship of Shakti. The most important and popular form of *yantra* is the *śrīcakra,* a compositional diagram of the meeting of nine equilateral triangles. *Śrīcakra* is worshipped in a self-existent form naturally engraved on a rock at Hari Parbat, which has been called Pradyumna Pīṭha in ancient Kashmiri texts. Devotees of the Goddess Sharikā worship her here as "Cakreśwarī" and 'Rajarajeśwarī. Devotees of Tripurā or Tripura Sundarī in Kashmir also worship the *śrīcakra* as visual expression of the Supreme Goddess. Kashmiri Hindus hold the *śrīcakra* to be the "linear body" of Shiva and Shakti in union, as described in 'Lalitā Triśatī'. "The *yantra* is to be worshipped in the mind or in a physical manifestation", David Kinsely points out.[10] The *svarūpa* (form) of *śrīcakra* has been explained in the following verse of Lalitā Triśatī:

bindu-trikoṇa-vasukoṇa daśāryugma
manvasra-nāgadala-sanyutā ṣodaśāraṁ /
vṛttatrayaṁ ca dhāraṇī-sadana-trayaṁ ca
śricakra rājaṁ-uditaṁ parādevatāyaḥ //

Instead of giving a literal translation of the above verse, I feel inclined to quote David Kinsley who has succinctly explained the compositional scheme of *śrīcakra* in the following words:

> "The *chakra* is essentially made up of nine triangles, five pointing downward and four pointing upward (in some cases five are pointing upward and four are pointing downward), which overlap each other and create many subsidiary triangles; these in turn are located within an eight-petaled lotus, which in turn is within a sixteen-petaled lotus; the lotuses are surrounded by four circles; and the whole is enclosed within four gates of triple lines. In the very centre of the *śrīcakra* is a dot, the *bindu.*"[11]

The five downward-pointing triangles represent Shakti and are therefore known as *Śakticakras,* while the four upward-pointing triangles represent Shiva and are known as *Śivacakras*. The lines of these triangles overlap and intersect, forming thirty-four more triangles and an octagon. These configurations too are called *cakras.The* names of the nine *cakras* thus formed are:

	Name of the Cakra	Shape	Colour
1.	*Sarvānandamaya Cakra*	Central dot	Red
2.	*Sarvārtha-Siddhiprada Cakra*	Triangle	Yellow
3.	*Sarvarogahara Cakra*	Octagon	Black
4.	*Sarvarakṣākara Cakra*	Configuration of 10 triangles	Green
5.	*Sarvārtha – sādhaka Cakra*	Configuration of 10 triangles	Red
6.	*Sarva – saubhagyadāyaka Cakra*	Configuration of 14 triangles	Blue
7.	*Sarva – saṇkṣobhana Cakra*	Eight-petaled lotus	Pink
8.	*Sarva – paripūraka Cakra*	Sixteen-petaled lotus	Blue
9.	*Trailokyamohana Cakra*	Three concentric circles	–

Each line, each colour, each detail has its symbolic significance; each *cakra*, each lotus petal has a presiding deity or Shakti. There are also attendant deities guarding the four outer gates associated with various *siddhis*. To put it in the words of David Kinsley again: "The *Shrichakra* expresses the essential nature of ultimate reality as the interaction and mutual co-inherence of Shiva and Shakti, male and female, potentiality and actuality. The *bindu* in the center represents their absolute union and identity, while the rest of the *chakra* represents their evolution into the cosmos."[12]

Other manifestations of the Mother Goddess too are embodied in the form of *cakras*. The Goddess Kshīr Bhavanī is represented by her own *cakra*, which "consists of seven parts enclosed one within the other". In his booklet 'Khir Bhavani Spring', Samsar Chand Kaul has given a detailed description of this *cakra* along with the presiding deities of each part.[13] It consists of three triangles, the inner - most triangle being downward pointed with a dot (*bindu*) in the centre; this triangle is located within two triangles superimposed to form a *ṣaṭakoṇa* or a six-pointed star; these two triangles representing Shiva and Shakti are in turn placed within a circular diagram representing an eight-petaled lotus; the lotus is surrounded by three concentric circles; and the whole combination of triangles and circles is enclosed within four three-lined gates. As with the *śrīcakra*, all these formations have their presiding female deities and mantras. The mantra of the *bindu* or the dot is "*Śrī Mahārajñyai, namaḥ*", which means "We pay homage to Shri Maharajñī, the Great Queen".

(11) Other Forms of Ritual Drawings

In performance of their different religious rites Kashmiri Hindus first prepare the sacred site by making ritual drawings on the ground according to directions prescribed in religious texts. These drawings are used for placing ritual objects and giving direction to ritual action. Different diagrams and motifs are arranged in different patterns according to the type of ritual being performed. A common element in the patterns related to the passage of time rites is the *kalaśa* diagram with an eight-petaled lotus drawn for placing an actual *kalaśa* or pitcher full of water on it. *Kalaśa pūjana* or the worship of the pitcher of water is generally the first step preparatory to the main ritual in several Pūjās. The *kalaśa* diagrams are drawn with lime and are of three kinds viz. *Brahma kalaśa, Indra kalaśa* and *Astra kalaśa,* with their designs varying slightly from each other. Thus, the *Brahma kalaśa* is of palmate shape with a *ṣaṭcakra* base. Within it is drawn an eight-petaled lotus and outside it there is a parrot on the left and a pitcher on the right. The *Indra kalaśa* on the other hand is rectangular in shape with a pointed arch-like figure in the middle rising above it and having a flower on top and an eight-petaled lotus below it. The arch stands on a *ṣaṭcakra* base. The parrot and the water-pitcher are as in the *Brahma kalaśa.* The two upper sides of the horizontally standing rectangle are produced to form four triangles with the other two lines. The *kalaśa* is divided into several sections showing *ayudhas* or implements of various gods within them, such as the discus, trident, mace, club, bow, arrow, sword, noose etc.

The *agnikuṇḍa* diagram is a rectangular configuration with a *ṣaṭcakra* base and a triangular top above which there is a saffron flower or a *patākā* (flag). It is a vertical rectangle divided into two squares of equal area, the lower circle having an eight-petaled lotus enclosed within it. The upper and lower sides of the squares are produced forming triangles with the other two sides.

The two vertical sides of the upper square depict corns of grain. Apart from the *Brahma kalaśa* or *Indra kalaśa* and the *agnikuṇḍa* configurations, which are present in almost every setting, the eight-petaled lotuses too are a common feature and are arranged in different patterns for placing ritual objects on or invoking the presence of deities or forces governing a ritual performance. In the Kashmiri Hindu ritual related to the sacred thread ceremony, a temple-like structure is drawn with a *ṣaṭcakra* base along with the *kalaśa* and the *agnikuṇḍa*. Two circular figures

showing several concentric circles with rays are drawn to represent the sun and the moon. In a ritual related to a girl's marriage the '*pīṭharekhā*' is drawn for placing the seat where she is to be given a ritual bath. Another figure called the '*svastirekhā*' is drawn in a *lagna* (nuptials) related ritual.

In the *antyeṣṭi* (last rites) related ritual a diagram called *cittāvāsa* is drawn on the cremation ground near the place on which the pyre is to be built and the dead body laid before cremation. It is basically a *Shivakarma* concept but adopted by Kashmiri Hindus in general. The *cittāvāsa* looks like a grid of intersecting lines enclosed by a rectangle resembling a web or a net and is drawn in the belief that it frees the departed soul from karmic bonds. Placed outside the rectangle occupying small circles at all the eight cardinal points are its governing deities Yama, Vishnu and some other gods, demigods and spirits.

There is a symbolism inherent in the shapes and combinations of these ritual drawings that links art to ritual acts. The geometrical forms such as the square, the rectangle, the triangle, the circle, and motifs like the lotus all have their basis in the concept of the relationship of the sacred and the mundane. An elucidation of this point needs a space far beyond the scope of my present inquiry. The square, for instance, stands for consecrated space in the ritualistic context. The circle can be easily identified with "the cyclical flow of time". The symbolism has been clearly brought out by Dr Kapila Vatsyayan in her book 'The Square and the Circle of the Indian Arts'. In her view these arts in their core reflect an Indian world-view based on Indian speculative and cosmological thought. It would also not be irrelevant to quote Heather Elgood's views in this context. She writes:

> "The square is the fundamental form of Indian architecture but it must not be forgotten that the square presupposes the circle and results from it. Life, growth and movement are visualized in a circle, while the square is perceived as a mark of order, finality, and of perfection beyond life and death."[14]

In fact, as Stella Kramrisch suggests, a superhuman presence is communicated with by the drawing of certain shapes. They point to the "power of the line to demarcate and contain force", to use the words of Elwood again. This obviously applies with the same connotations to the lines and geometrical patterns one comes across the ritual arts of Kashmir The motifs of the lotus and the pitcher of water

recur frequently in Kashmiri Hindu ritual drawings, some of which we have described above. Their symbolism too has been amply discussed by scholars.

(12) Aniconic Symbols of Shivarātri Pūjā

Consecrated pottery plays a significant role in Kashmiri Hindu rituals. This is most evident during 'Herath' or Shivaratri Pūjā, the greatest festival of Kashmiri Hindus. Special hand-moulded vessels of various shapes and sizes are believed to be charged with spiritual power and are said to represent the main deities worshipped in the Pūjā. As we have already pointed out, an earthen pitcher is filled with water and walnuts representing Vaṭuka Bhairava with whose name the whole Pūjā is associated. An open-mouthed vessel called *vāgur,* which has three distinct parts, represents Shiva in the process of *unmeṣa* or manifestation. Another image of baked clay resembling a cone-shaped *linga* is called the *sŏnipŏtul*. It is actually image of five-faced Shiva on which water is sprinkled for *abhiśeka*. Then there is a rather large pot mysteriously called '*Rishi*' but is probably an aniconic image of Mahadevī (the Great Goddess). Four small vessels called *sanivāri* are regarded as *yoginīs* and *kṣetrapālas* (guardians of directions). Though they are subsidiary or rather attendant deities, their Pūjā is essential during what is known as *"Shivarātri yāga"* because of its Tantric nature. The word '*sanivāri*' literally means "vessels for sprinkling water", although they are of a miniature size. But it is the symbolism that counts. It may also be mentioned that before the main Pūjā, worshipping the *kalaśa* or the water-pot is an essential preliminary of Kashmiri Pūjā rites as it is believed to be the abode of all deities. According to Elgood, it conveys the idea of fullness and is "such a central element in and symbol of Hindu art that no ceremony can be performed without the installation of an auspicious vessel".[15]

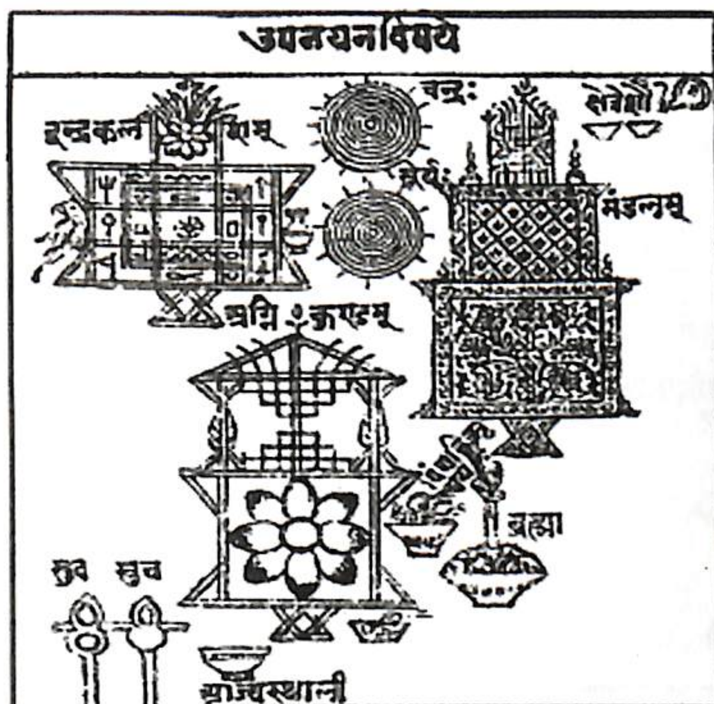
The origin of the aniconic Shivarātri images is obscure and it is difficult to explain their ritual purpose. Obviously they have a symbolic significance of their own, but their identification with particular deities appears to have been mostly forgotten and only the outer ritual remains today. The etymology of the words '*vāgur*', '*sanivāri*' etc. also is not clear, the interpretations given by some people in their attempt to explain them being absolutely ridiculous. Kashmiri Hindus, it may be noted, have no potters among them. Prior to their exodus from Kashmir they would commission local Muslim potters to make these pots for them and cast them into the river after their religious or ritual use was over.

(13) *Pārthiveshvara*

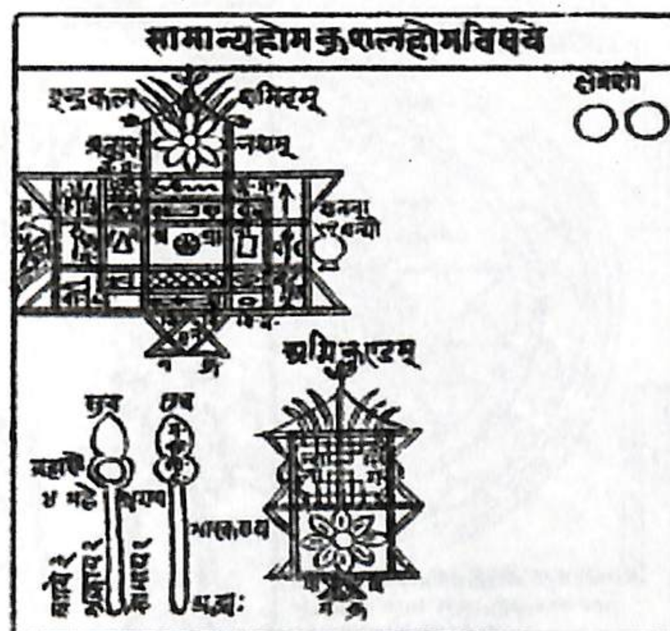
Pārthiveshvara images on the other hand were exclusively made by Kashmiri Brahmins themselves. The *Shiva linga* and the images of the Devi, Kumara, Ganesha and the Ekādasha Rudras, which need considerable skill to make, were artistically conceived and created. The Pūjā became particularly popular during the Muslim rule in Kashmir when it became difficult for them to go openly to their temples for worship because of the fear of religious persecution.

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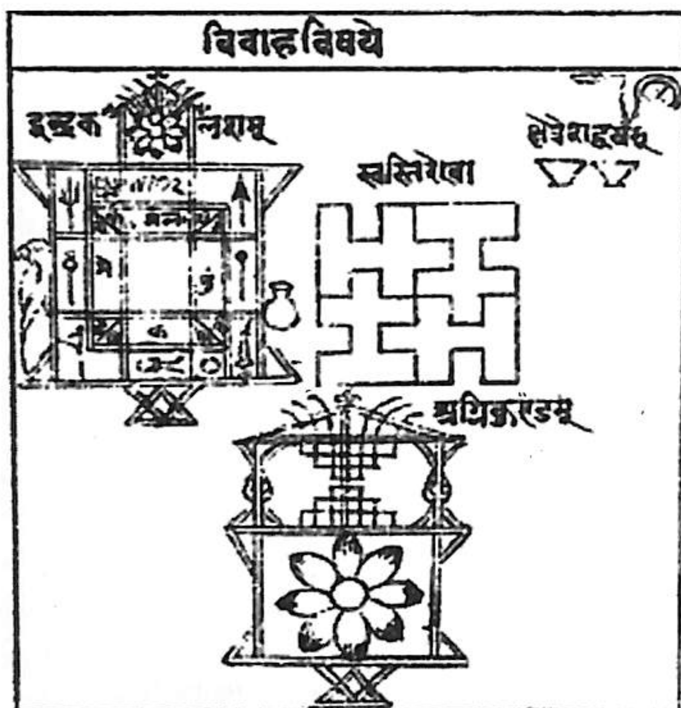
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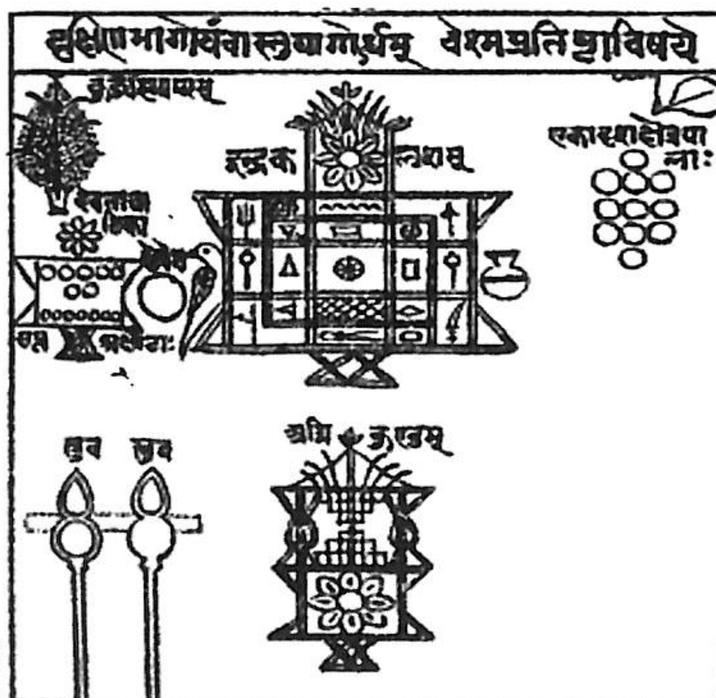
Ritual drawings related to *upanayana*



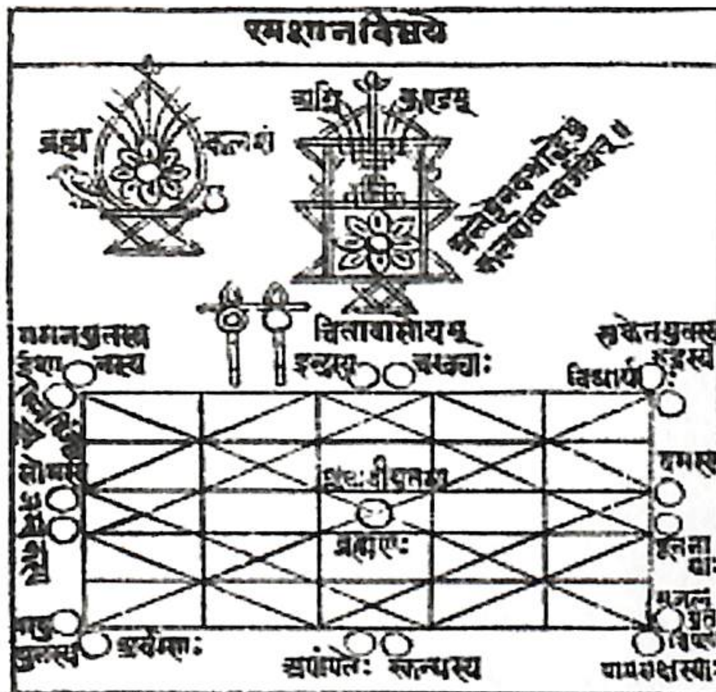
Ritual drawings related to *kushal hom* or the thanks giving *havan*



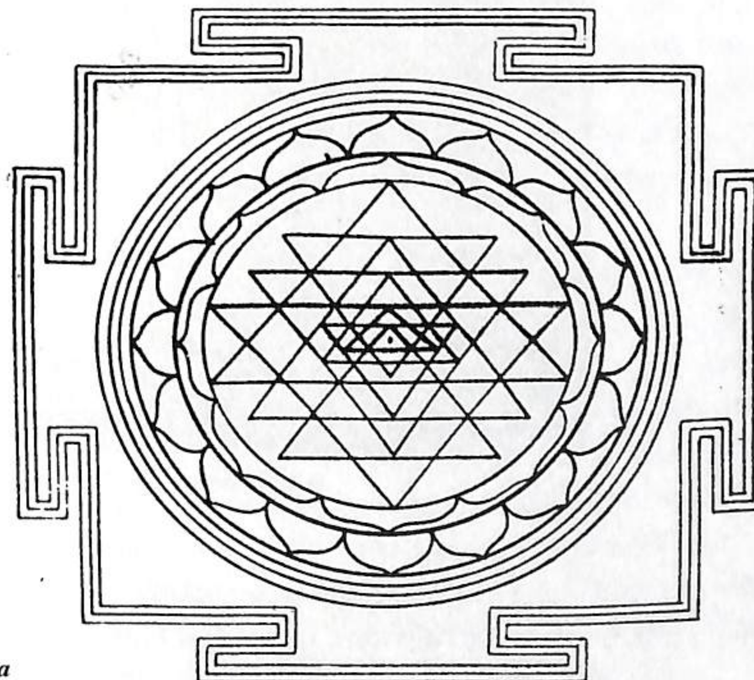
Ritual drawings related to marriage ceremony



Ritual drawings related to *griha pravesh* or entry into a newly constructed house



Ritual drawings related to cremation showing the *chittavāsa*



Shrichakra



A ***krūla pacch*** **painting**

CHAPTER 10

Conclusions

In this study of Kashmiri rituals and ritual arts we have ventured into an area which has hardly received any scholarly attention. Although a large number of scholars have chosen to focus on Indian and in particular Vedic, ritual in the recent years, viewing it from different perspectives, ritual behaviour of Kashmiri Hindus has been completely missing from their studies. This is in spite of the fact that Kashmir Shaiva philosophy has evoked unprecedented interest throughout the scholastic world during this very period. Yet there is much in the religious rites and ceremonies of the numerically small but culturally rich Kashmiri Hindu community that could form a fascinating field of inquiry for the religious historian as well as the social anthropologist. That is what I found during the course of my explorations which have led to this book taking shape.

It is true that the fundamental core of Kashmiri Hindu rituals is the same as that of the ritual system prevailing in other parts of India, emanating as they do mostly from the same Vedic or Agamic sources. But it is equally true that with *deśāchāra* or regional factor coming into play a whole new body of ceremonies and rites has evolved around that core over the centuries which can be distinctly characterized as Kashmiri. But would it be pertinent to examine the ritual activity of Kashmiri Hindus in religious terms alone? Well known German scholar of Vedic ritual, Frits Staal describes ritual in ethnological terms of "FAP" ("Fixed Action Pattern") and "MAP" ("Modal Action Pattern") as suggested by W.H. Thorpe and Lan Barlow.[1] According to him, "rites become religious when they are provided

with a religious interpretation". Accordingly, he refers to Asian rituals as rituals without religion.[2] Durkheim on the other hand regards ritual as a necessary feature of religion.[3] Richard H. Davis, a scholar of medieval Shaiva ritual, is critical of those scholars who "characteristically present Indian rituals as instances of highly elaborate routinized behaviour either divorced from any formative consciousness or based on severely flawed apprehensions of the world".[4] He describes as "shaky, one legged inquires", such scholarly studies as tend to ignore the philosophical foundations on which the rituals are based.[5] Davis is actually referring to the Shaivagamic tradition that regards *jñāna* (philosophical knowledge) and *kriyā* (ritual action) as "integral and necessary to one another". It may be mentioned here that according to the traditional Tantric pattern a religious treatise must be divided into four *pādas* or sections of *jñāna, yoga, kriyā* and *caryā* to be complete, *jñāna* and *kriyā* constituting two broadly accepted divisions regarded to have an *inter se* relationship. Abhinavagupta's great work, the Tantrāloka, offers a rich insight into both speculative and ritualistic aspects of Tantric esotericism. The latter aspect, it must be pointed out, has deeply influenced the ritualistic behaviour of Kashmiri Hindus even though it remains anchored in the ordainments of Laugākshi's Gṛhyasūtras so far as domestic rituals are concerned.

In this study we have referred to the various phases through which Kashmiri Hindu ritualistic system has passed before evolving in its present form. Here we shall concern ourselves with recapitulating some of the points we have already made about its distinguishing features while shedding light on some additional facts. We shall begin obviously with the Gṛhyasūtras of Laugākshi and its *paddhati* which being associated with the Kāṭhaka school of the Black Yajurveda present the Vedic substratum of the sacramental beliefs and religious practices of its adherents in Kashmir. How far did the domain of these *sūtras* extend beyond Kashmir is not known, nor do we know to what extent and how faithfully were their ordainments carried out there in their pure and pristine form, but one thing is certain that this substratum was already overlaid, or rather overwhelmed by indigenous elements by the time the Nilamata Purāna was composed. The Nilamata does not deal with domestic rituals, but the picture that it presents of the religious life of early Kashmiris shows that the shift to Puranic modes of worship had already taken place. And despite the fact that Vedic mantras still formed the liturgical core of the chants

that accompany ritual acts, they were used in essentially post-Vedic practices. The Nilamata is a text belonging to the 6th century CE or so but actually covers developments dating back to much earlier times, representing the stage when Puranic elements had replaced the Vedic fire sacrifice (*yajña*) by practices like *vrata* (observance of religious vows) *dāna* (charity), *japa* (repetition of the deity's name), *utsava* (festivals,) *tīrthayātrā* (pilgrimages to sacred places) and *pūjā* (individual or collective worship of iconic deities), *upvāsa* (fasts), etc. Yet many features of the Vedic ritual were retained in the new liturgical program, such as *homa* (a kind of brief fire sacrifice) and mantra recitation, though there is a clear difference between the Vedic and the Puranic mantras (an aspect we shall discuss a little later). These practices were relatively simpler but were supposed to bring the same merits and awards to the worshipper as the much more complex Vedic sacrifices.

A significant feature of religion in the Kashmir of the Nilamata era was the emergence of a whole new pantheon of gods and goddesses who could be accessed and summoned through their anthropomorphic images. This was unlike the Vedic deities who despite the colourful imagery of the hymns which invoke them remain invisible as they are without any material embodiments. Besides the five major Puranic deities viz. Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva, Durga, Ganesha in their various forms and Surya, a host of gods and goddesses came to be worshipped and a number of festivals dedicated to them celebrated. These included the Nāga deities, the deities of the Pañcarātra and the Bhāgvata cults, Kubera and even Buddha as an incarnation of Vishnu; but what indicates the existence and popularity of the mother goddesses cult in early Kashmir is the great number of female deities mentioned in the Purāna. Some of them were quite known like Umā, Lakṣmī, Shāradā, Aditi and Śachī and some of them like Śyāmā, Rāgnyā and an array of river goddesses, relatively new and essentially of folk origin. The process of assimilation of the folk gods and goddesses into the Hindu pantheon also seems to have started during this period. Apart from the religious practices mentioned above, elements of Pūjā rituals like some of the standard *upacāras* (worship services) had also developed. Temple rituals involving the cycle of these services to the deity had become a part of the religious life of early Kashmiris. Soon, temple became "the dominant religious institution of Kashmir", to borrow words from Richard H. Davis.

Around the 7th century CE an esoteric tradition known as Tantrism which

involved secret rituals dealing with self-mastery for attaining *mokṣa* came to occupy the centre-stage in the religion practiced in Kashmir, as it did in many other parts of north and south India. With its non-Vedic origin going back to a much earlier time, Tantrism is based on an extensive body of liturgical texts which are primarily centered on the cults of Shiva and Shakti, as well as Vishnu, the Shakti cult arising a little later but gaining fast popularity and predominance. Comprising the Shaiva *āgamas,* Vaishnava *saṁhitās* and Shākta *tantras,* these texts are liturgical compendiums providing guidance on rituals and worship rites to adepts as well as lay worshippers. Tantric followers make use of meditative devices like mantra or mystic syllables and *yantra* or ritual diagrams, and stress on the doctrine of the union of male and female principles (Shiva and Shakti) as the ritual means to attain enlightenment and liberation. The Tantric or rather Āgamic texts from which Kashmir Shaivism later drew heavily upon to give a non-dualist interpretation to their doctrines and rituals have been already referred to earlier. They include the Mālinī Vijaya Tantra, Rudrayāmala Tantra, Svacchanda Tantra, Netra Tantra, Mṛgendra Tantra, Vāmakeśvara Tantra etc. Shākta texts such as the Lalitā Triśatī, Lalitā Sahasranāma, Kubjikā Tantra, Yoginī Tantra, Kaulavalī Tantra, Kulārṇava Tantra, Durgā Saptaśatī, Devī Bhāgvata, Śaradā Tilaka etc. also provided the theoretical underpinning to Tantric practices in medieval Kashmir. In the 10th century C.E., Abhinavagupta synthesized and integrated the doctrines and rituals of the Tantric Krama, Kula and Trika schools into Kashmir Shaivism, bringing them all under one exegetical scheme in his monumental work the Tantrāloka. Many of these practices have been incorporated into the ritual system followed by Kashmiri Brahmins today. This system, which also derives from Śiva Siddhānta as well as *Pañcarātra*, thus comprises three clear strata or tiers – the Vedic, Puranic and Tantric, all of them combining into a composite whole. It extends not only to esoteric and mystic practices which one hardly comes across today but also to the domestic life-cycle rituals and Pūjā rites.

As Frits Staal has pointed out, ritual traditions have social significance in that they identify groups and distinguish them from each other. They give people a sense of identity.[6] Taken in this sense Kashmiri Hindu rituals distinctly project cultural and social values. One of their interesting features is the way Vedic mantras are juxtaposed with Puranic and Tantric mantras, only the performing priest

knowing when and where and in which ritual performance they are to be inserted. He accordingly memorizes these mantras and even uses them out of their original context. Staal, however, is of the opinion that mantras are meaningless and that there is practically little difference between Vedic, Puranic and Tantric mantras, "the monosyllabic mantras of the *stobha* type" in the Vedas having "re-emerged in Tantrism after apparently lying dormant for more than a millennium."[7] Wheelock and Andre Podoux on the other hand make clear distinction between the various types of mantras, their views being quoted by Staal himself. Thus, according to Wheelock, the Vedic mantra "stands as a means to the ends of the sacrifice. The Tantric mantra, on the other hand as the essence of the ritual procedure, is an object of vaiue in itself ..."[8] Podoux is of the view that "Shaivite mantras are different from Vedic mantras because a Vedic mantra is essentially a verse or group of verses".[9] Staal gives examples to shows that some of the Tantric mantras are actually Vedic. Whatever the case may be their happy co-existence in a Kashmiri Hindu ritual performance is quite worth taking note of and confirms our contention that the Kashmiri ritual has usually a three-tiered structure. An interesting example is that every major Kashmiri ritual begins with *kalaśa pūjā* and the mantra '*Omkāro yasya mūlam*', which describes the Vedas as a *kalpavṛkṣa* or the wiṣh – fulfilling tree. The functional difference between the Vedic and Tantric mantras, can, however, not be ignored, the latter being used in ritual as well as meditation.

Another interesting point is that the most popular Kashmiri Goddesses Rāgnyā and Shārikā are worshipped with the *bīja* mantras (and *yantras*) of Tripura Sundarī, the fifteen-syllabled mantra of the last mentioned goddess being used for both. However, this identification of local goddesses with the great Mother Goddess herself is not peculiar to Kashmir alone. This becomes all the more interesting when we note that according to Tantric doctrine the deities are identical with their mantras. The deity is said to be present "as soon as the mantra that invokes it has been recited". This makes it of fundamental importance that the mantra should be pronounced correctly. But keeping in view the peculiar pronunciation of Sanskrit by Kashmiris in general, this becomes virtually impossible. And yet Kashmiris have been great Tantrists. Perhaps, the distortions that we find in their pronunciation of Sanskrit words arose at a later stage due to the extensive use of the Persian script during the Muslim rule.

As in the case of rituals of life, in performing rituals of death too, Kashmiri Hindus are influenced by the notions of purity and impurity (*śauca- aśauca*) and auspicious – inauspicious (*śubha – aśubha*). But even more than that they regard the ritual of cremation primarily as a 'sacrifice' or an act of expiation through the medium of fire because of the influence of Shaiva ritual. It is the "final" sacrifice, according to the Shaivas, before the departed soul attains liberation or identification with the "supreme state of Shivahood". In fact, the death rites among Kashmiri Brahmins are very complicated because of this influence, as the Shaiva priests perform initiation rites even on the cremation ground. The Shiva Karma funerary rituals are in particular long and complicated as a whole set of purification actions are performed to consume and destroy the karmic bonds of the deceased. The *cittāvāsa* or *māyājāla* in which the departed soul is "captured" as though in a net with mantras and then restored to the dead body, are meant to accomplish this. The sacrificial fire Agni, as Richard H. Davis explains, "identified as a form of Shiva's power of re-absorption, then consumes the body."[10] It is only "after suitable purifications and preparations" that the deceased is placed on the funeral pyre, he points out. Shiva Karma, in fact, is only another name of the ritualistic aspects of Kashmir Shaiva system. This can be seen in the post-funeral rites of *śrāddha* also through which the dead person's transition from *preta* (disembodied spirit) to *pitṛ* (ancestor) is ensured.

Kashmiri Pūjā rituals by and large follow the generally accepted pattern of sixteen *upacāras* or its abbreviated form, whether it be daily worship (*nitya pūjā*) or special ceremonies related to sacred dates or sacred places (*naimitika pūjā*), as individual or collective religious activity whether practiced in the temple or at home. In its simplest outline it involves invoking the deity, reverential gestures like *namaskāra* or bowing or kneeling before it, prostrating before it and touching its feet, consecrating the worship place and ritual objects, purification rites, treating the deity as an honoured guest by offering it various *upcāras* like *āsana* or seat, *pādya* or water for washing feet, flowers, sandalwood or saffron perfume, incense, garment, food, and betel nuts and finally bidding it farewell (*visarjana*). Other important ritual actions are waving a five-wick oil or camphor lamp (*ratnadīpa*), waving a chowrie or a flywhisk, holding a parasol and singing of hymns to the accompaniment of a ringing hand bell. Anointment with vermilion, sandalwood

paste and oils are also a part of the series of services which the worshipper offers to the deity. This is what has been termed as "the least common denominator" of Pūjā by Davis, "as a form of Hindu worship"[11] But it we look more closely, the Kashmiri mode of Pūjā presents its own version of the rites by its stress on some elements for which it has detailed prescriptions. Thus within the broad framework of Pūjā, there is emphasis on the preliminary rites known as *pañcaśuddhi* or five purifications. These consist of purification of the worshipper's self, purification of the place of worship, purification of the ritual objects, purification of the mantras and purification of the image or idol of the deity itself. Another distinguishing element is *tarpaṇa* or offering of libation to the gods, sages and ancestors which is a part of almost every major *pūjā* a Kashmiri Hindu performs. At times it seems that Kashmiri Hindus are too much obsessed with the idea of propitiating the ancestors.

We have referred to some distinctive features of the Kashmiri Hindu ritualistic tradition in the preceding chapters also. For fear of repetition, we shall not again refer to them here. The Kashmiri Hindu way of life, it must be reiterated, has been widely disrupted and so has the observance by them of what most of them think to be the core of their religion – their rituals. Yet the quintessential ideas behind them of uniting the divine and the human, sacred and the profane, of transforming the mundane into the spiritual still remain. This study of the ritualistic behaviour of a people, who are no longer located in their geographical or cultural habitat, is by no means complete. There are many areas that need further and extensive investigation. But what has been accomplished herein is opening of a line of inquiry into an unexplored area.

NOTES

1. See Frits Staal, *Ritual and Mantras: Rules without Meaning*, Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass, 1997, p. 388.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Richard H. Davis, *Worshipping Shiva in Medieval India*, Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass, 2000, Preface p. x.
5. Ibid.

6. Frits Staal, *Ritual and Mantras: Rules without Meaning,* Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass, 1997, p. 388.
7. Ibid, p. 236.
8. Ibid, p. 223.
9. Ibid, p. 224.
10. Richard H. Davis, *Worshipping Shiva in Medieval India,* Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass, 2000, p. 110.
11. Ibid, p. 39.

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Zarakāsay or the first tonsure of a boy



Abīd or the round for alms



The ritual bath before *divagon*



Painting the *krūl*

Photographs: Courtesy B.L. Fotedar



Daya bata or the common meal



Posha pūjā



A Kashmiri Pandit bride and bridegroom

Photographs: Courtesy B.L. Fotedar



Kalasha pūjā



Agnikuṇḍa



Havan Sāmagrī

Photographs: Courtesy Sunil Raina



A *havan* being performed



Ratnadeepa or lamps for collective *pūjā*

Photographs: Courtesy Sunil Raina



Svacchanda Bhairava

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Shaivism. Many of the practices of these schools came to be incorporated in the ritual system followed by Kashmiri Hindus today. Along with this the goddesses cults also gained popularity and predominance, in particular those dedicated to the worship of the most popular local goddesses Ragnya and Sharika who came to be identified with the great Mother Goddess herself.

Dividing the rites and ceremonies of the Kashmiri Hindus into the broad categories of samskaras or life-cycle rituals and other domestic rituals, puja or worship rituals including festivals and ritual arts, this book looks at them as patterns of culture and aspects of social life peculiar to the community. It uses the methodology of both examining the source texts and undertaking field work, while focusing on the elements that lend these rituals their distinct colour and flavour and providing interesting insights into an exclusive scenario of religious activity hardly known to the world outside.

Dr. Shashi Shekhar Toshkhani is a renowned scholar, literary historian and critic, poet and translator. Writing authoritatively in English as well as Hindi, he has made valuable contributions on a wide range of subjects connected with culture, literature, and history of Kashmir after making an in-depth study and research. To his credit are scores of research papers on philosophy, aesthetics, art, rituals, language, literature, ancient lore etc. presented at national and international seminars and published in research journals and books. His published works include a critical history of Kashmiri literature in Hindi which has been hailed as "a landmark- study of Kashmiri literature in new light and historical perspective". He has so far authored / edited/ translated more than a dozen books, the latest being the 'Cultural Heritage of Kashmiri Pandits', which he has jointly edited with Prof. K. Warikoo. Presently he is the Chief Editor of Koshur Samachar and Malini and Editor Praznath.

Cover Photograph:
Deities inside the sacred symbol Om
Courtesy: Virendra Bangroo



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